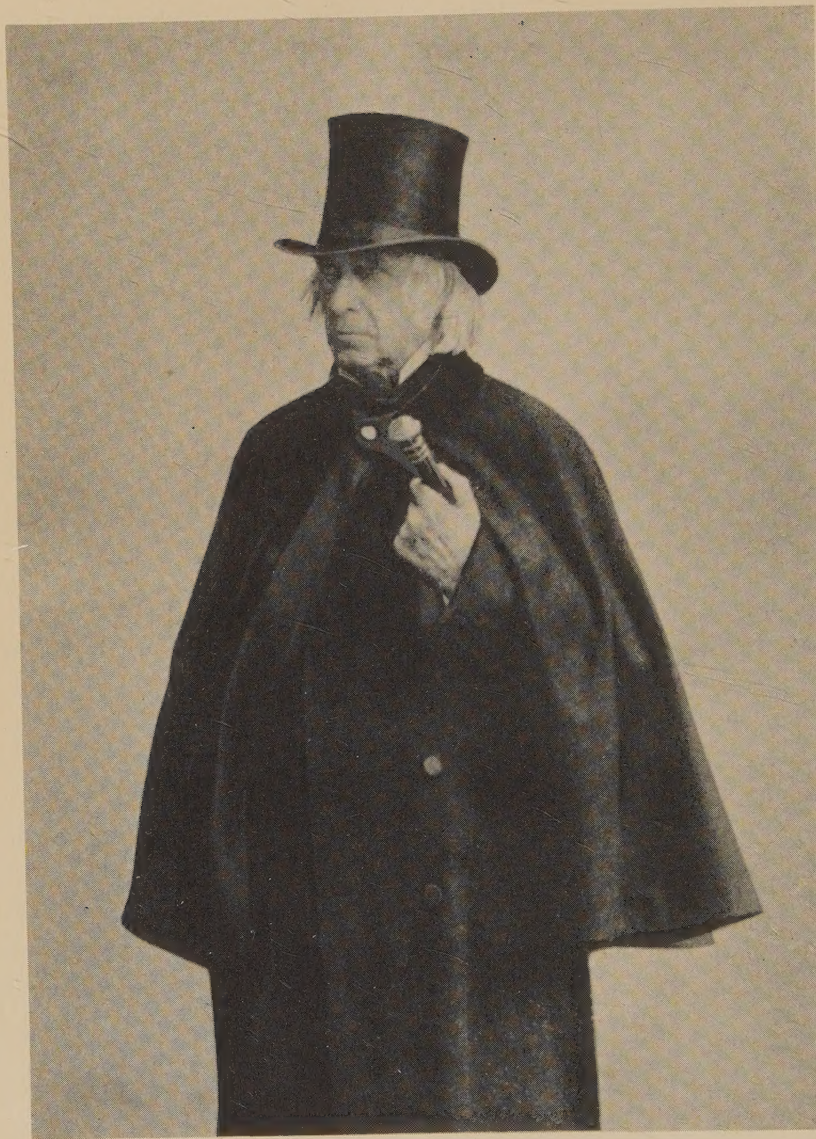


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A. BRONSON ALCOTT

VOLUME II.



A. Bronson Alcott

(In his eighty-second year, travelling in Iowa. 1882.)

A. BRONSON ALCOTT

HIS LIFE AND PHILOSOPHY

BY

F. B. SANBORN

AND

WILLIAM T. HARRIS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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MEMOIR

OF

BRONSON ALCOTT.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "DIAL," THE COMMUNITY, AND THE CONVERSATIONS.

JUST as the Temple School had made Alcott a public character, who had before been only studious and private, so the "Dial," the Chardon Street Convention, the Community at Fruitlands, and his open Conversations, with their Orphic utterances (which the "Dial" put before the world in cold print), made him conspicuous, and the target for much indiscriminate odium; praise, ridicule, and misapprehension. The years from 1840 to 1845 may be taken as the zenith of his idealism, and the nadir of his worldly success. Such practical qualities as he had—and he had many, interfused with the higher properties of his poetic nature—were clouded, both in fact, and almost irretrievably in the public estimation, by the persistency with which in these years he carried out his austere principles, that seemed to lay the axe at the root of every existing institution. We look at history after it has been clarified by

centuries of forgetfulness and classified by the backward-looking eye of reason; so that the incoherent mixture of tendencies and events in any given century lies before us on the page, chiefly in the form of marked events, or the life of eminent men; and we forget that those times, like our own, held everything jumbled together,—the existing generation quite incapable of seeing what would survive out of this hurly-burly. Thus in the third Christian century, when monastic institutions grew up in Egypt, under an impulse given by Pachomius, the Roman conscript of the Thebaid, how few could have anticipated that this strange institution would be almost the only survival of Egyptian civilization at that period! Roman wars, Alexandrian philosophy, the religious quarrels, the literature and art of that century, have passed away, or exist only in fragments; while the monastic institution, like the pillar of Saint Simeon in the mountains of Antioch, has risen higher and higher, and gone on inflicting torture on the human frame and the human mind. In the Transcendental era everything was mingled together, as in the reign of Constantine, and the long controversy between Arius and Athanasius. There was warfare and worship, literature and art,—there were political absurdities and monstrosities, social iniquities, world-changing in-

ventions, a new development of science and material comfort; and amidst all these the seed of a new social, religious, and political order was slowly germinating, though planted and tended only by men who, like Pachomius and Simeon, were first regarded as fragments of a vile multitude or fanatics of a desperate faith, but who may hereafter (stranger things have happened) be worshipped as saints, like Simeon on his pillar and Pachomius in the sands of Egypt. Our apparent failures are often the greatest success; and there is nothing, not even the Crucifixion, which the levity of mankind cannot hold in derision for a time. Great was the laughter in Boston, and lively, no doubt, the village cachinnation of Concord, when the Boston "Post" daily burlesqued Alcott in the "Dial," and Emerson in his lecture-room; when Dr. Holmes, at the festivals of Harvard College, laughed at Edmund Quincy, at Garrison and Phillips, as

"Men such as May to Marlborough Chapel brings,
Lean, hungry, savage, anti-everythings,
Copies of Luther in the pasteboard style, —

or, with more copious rhetoric, specially barbed for Alcott and Emerson, recited this: —

"With uncouth words they tire their tender lungs,
The same bald phrases on their hundred tongues:
'Ever' 'The Ages' in their page appear,
'Alway' the bedlamite is called a 'Seer;'

On every leaf the 'earnest' sage may scan,
Portentous bore! their 'many-sided' man, —
A weak eclectic, groping vague and dim,
Whose every angle is a half-starved whim,
Blind as a mole and curious as a lynx,
Who rides a beetle, which he calls a 'Sphinx.'
And oh, what questions asked in club-foot rhyme,
Of Earth the tongueless and the deaf-mute Time!
Here babbling 'Insight' shouts in Nature's ears
His last conundrum on the orbs and spheres;
There Self-inspection sucks its little thumb,
With 'Whence am I?' and 'Wherefore did I come?'
Deluded infants, will they ever know
Some doubts must darken o'er the world below,
Though all the Platos of the nursery trail
Their 'clouds of glory' at the go-cart's tail?
Oh, might these couplets their attention claim
That gain their author the Philistine's name!
(A stubborn race, that, spurning foreign law,
Was much belabored with an ass's jaw).¹

Such remarks passed for very good wit when Everett was President of Harvard College; and

¹ Joking at the "Dial" was not confined to the Philistines. J. F. Clarke and C. P. Cranch, both contributors to its pages, and friends of Emerson and Alcott, spent much time at Louisville and Cincinnati, or wherever they might be, in drawing caricatures of Emerson, Alcott, Margaret Fuller, Ellery Channing, John Dwight, and themselves, as "Apostles of the Newness." They began in 1835, and kept it up till after Charles Newcomb's "Dolon" appeared. Cranch seems to have been the chief artist, while Clarke wrote some of the verses. A barefoot countryman, whose head was one great eyeball, said, scoffing at Emerson's "Nature," "Standing on the bare ground, I become a transparent eyeball;" and

the record of that Alma Mater of Emerson and Wendell Phillips from 1838 to 1856 was not very

another, with a huge melon for body, sat in a cornfield, saying, "I expand and live in the warm day, like corn and melons." In the "Dial" period they represented a large man with the "Dial" protruding from his coat-pocket, while two other huge men are dancing near by, and singing to a meagre fellow-being, gazing at them with astonishment, these verses (quoted by Emerson from the new poetry of Ellery Channing in the "Dial" for October, 1840):—

"Greatly to be
Is enough for me,
Is enough for thee."

Another of these caricatures, "The Moral Influence of the 'Dial,'" represents a man in bed sipping wine, a copy of the "Dial" having fallen to the floor, while his wife sits at the foot of the bed blacking his boots. In one of Clarke's sketches Margaret Fuller is driving a carriage, with Emerson riding behind her; and the two sing, —

"Our 'Dial' shows the march of light
O'er forests, hills, and meadows."

To this a critic trudging by, says, —

"Not so, and yet you name it right;
It marks the flight of shadows."

These caricatures were exhibited by Cranch with great glee to Theodore Parker at West Roxbury, to George Ripley at Brook Farm, not far off, and, no doubt, to Emerson himself at Concord; but it is doubtful if any one would have ventured to show them to Alcott at that period, — so serious and superior was he. He was never entirely satisfied with the "Dial," of which he wrote to Heraud, after the first number appeared: "It satisfies me not, nor Emerson. It measures not the meridian, but the morning ray; the nations wait for the gnomon that shall mark the broad noon." At the

creditable, in regard either to philosophic speculation, manly politics, or social reformation. No sooner had Professor Norton — “the hard-headed Unitarian Pope,” as Carlyle called him — attacked Emerson for producing in his Divinity School Address “the latest form of infidelity,” than Harvard ceased to pay any respect to this youth of genius, and withheld from him those collegiate honors which were freely bestowed on dull, obscure, and obscuring persons, who took the popular side in theology and politics. She made Doctors of Laws out of Rufus Choate, Henry Black, Leonard Woods, Joel Parker, and Abbott Lawrence; she bestowed degrees on every Governor of Massachusetts, however casual or contemptible his politics; and on such unknown quantities as John Tayloe Lomax, John Bannister Gibson, Alphonso Potter, and Thomas Jefferson Sawyer; she even

close of its publication by Margaret Fuller in 1842, Alcott wrote to her: “The ‘Dial’ prefers a style of thought and diction not mine; nor can I add to its popularity with its chosen readers. A fit organ for such as myself is not yet, but is to be. The times require a full speech, a wise, humane, and brave sincerity, unlike all examples in literature, of which the ‘Dial’ is but the precursor. A few years more will give us all we desire, — the people all they ask.” See the exhaustive article by George Willis Cooke, in the “Journal of Speculative Philosophy” for July, 1885, on the “Dial” and its contributors. I shall quote from this article frequently in the following pages.

went so far, unconscious of the future, as to confer on Theodore Parker in 1840 the degree of Master of Arts; but she took no notice whatever of Emerson, of Wendell Phillips, of Edmund Quincy, nor, after 1846, of Charles Sumner,—all of them distinguished graduates of her own, and sure of distinction thereafter. Emerson was invited, in 1837, to deliver the annual address before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, and gave such a discourse as had never been heard in Cambridge before; for thirty years he was not again invited, although within that time he had extended his fame over the civilized world. The reasons for this neglect were more despicable than the fact itself; for a wish to preserve silence on the national sin of slavery and to conciliate the slaveholding oligarchy was chief among them. Even James Russell Lowell, born and passing his youth under the shadow of the University, and fitted by every gift, intellectual and social, to be its darling, as he became in his last thirty years, was equally under the ban while he was active in the Antislavery Society of Garrison and was writing the famous "Biglow Papers;" for Lowell was an Abolitionist, like Emerson and Alcott, although he had begun his long literary career, in his Class Poem of 1838, by attacking Emerson and Alcott, and taunting them with their anti-slavery opinions.

The "Dial" itself, that singular quarterly which from 1840 to 1844 was edited by Emerson and Margaret Fuller, George Ripley and Thoreau, should have received the praise and not the ridicule of the Cambridge scholars, whose own heavy and reactionary organ was the "North American Review." The "Dial" produced or gave refuge to more good literature in those four years than any other American periodical of the time in ten years; and its rare volumes now command any price the owner chooses to put on them,—like the first edition of Emerson's "Nature." It owed its name, and much of the impulse to its existence to Alcott; yet Alcott's contributions, particularly the "Orphic Sayings," were the occasion of boundless ridicule in the Boston "Post" and in Beacon Street drawing-rooms. Exactly why, it would now be hard to say; for these derided pages read, after the flight of half a century, like records of history, rather than the prophet's roll from which they were taken. For example ("Dial," January, 1841):

"The trump of reform is sounding throughout the world for a revolution of all human affairs. The issue we cannot doubt; yet the crises are not without alarm. Already is the axe laid at the root of that spreading tree, whose trunk is idolatry, whose branches are covetousness, war, and slavery, whose blossom is concupis-

cence, whose fruit is hate. Planted by Beelzebub, it shall be rooted up. Reformers are metallic; they are sharpest steel; they pierce whatsoever of evil or abuse they touch. Their souls are attempered in the fires of heaven; they are mailed in the might of principles, and God backs their purpose. They uproot institutions, erase traditions, revise usages, and renovate all things. They are the noblest of facts. Extant in time, they work for eternity; dwelling with men, they are with God.

"The reformer substitutes things for words, laws for usages, ideas for idols. But this is ever a deed, daring and damned, for which the culprit was aforesaid cropped, exiled, or slain. In our time, his sentence is commuted to slight and starvation. The words of a just man are mirrors in which the felon beholds his own features, and shrinks from the portrait painted therein by the speaker. Beware of a just man! he is a limner of souls; he draws in the colors of truth. Cunning durst not sit to him. The saints are alone popular in heaven, not on earth; elect of God, they are spurned by the world. They hate their age, its applause, its awards, their own affections even, save as these unite them with justice, with valor, with God. Whoso loves father or mother, wife or child, houses or lands, pleasures or honors or life, more than these, is an idolater, and worships idols of sense; his life is death, his love hate, his friends foes, his fame infamy.

"The ages dogmatize, and would stifle the boldest and freest thought. Their language is, 'Our posses-

sions skirt space, and we veto all possible discoveries of time. We are heirs of all wisdom, all excellence; none shall pass our confines; vain is the dream of a wilderness of thought to be vanquished by rebellion against us. We inherit the patrimony of God."

It had long been the wish of the early Transcendentalists to establish a magazine; for as early as March, 1835, Emerson wrote of this projected "organ of a Spiritual Philosophy," to be called "The Transcendentalist," "The Spiritual Inquirer," or the like, and he proposed Mr. Hedge for editor. But in April, 1835, Emerson proposed to Carlyle to emigrate to New England, edit the "Transcendentalist," lecture, and write books. Nothing was done, to accomplish the desired result, until the "Western Messenger" was established by Clarke and his friends at Cincinnati. The Symposium began to talk about it at the first meeting in 1836; and in the summer of 1839, inspired by the example of Heraud's "New Monthly Magazine" in London, the Transcendentalists, meeting at Concord, decided to issue a quarterly, with Margaret Fuller and George Ripley as editors. The unwieldy name of "Transcendentalist" was now discarded, and, at Alcott's suggestion, the new magazine was called "The Dial." It began with less than a hundred subscribers, and was first published by a firm long since extinct, Weeks,

Jordan, & Co. Like the publishers who undertook Alcott's magazine in Philadelphia ten years earlier, this Boston house soon became bankrupt, and the early numbers of the "Dial" were distributed in surplus copies to contributors. Miss Peabody, then a Boston bookseller, undertook the publication early in 1842; and thereafter Emerson became its editor, declining to accept any "partnership or oversight, such as Theodore Parker or George Ripley, for example;" adding: "So little skill have I in partnership that I am sure we should make each other mutually unhappy. Now I will ask of them their whole aid and furtherance."

Soon after, Alcott went to England, where he found his new friends ready for an international magazine, such as the "Atlantic Monthly" afterward became. As editor, Emerson proceeded to give the "Dial" something of this international character, and also to carry out what he had imagined for it in the summer of 1840, when he wrote in his journal: —

"I think our 'Dial' ought not to be a mere literary journal; the times demand of us all a more earnest aim. It ought to contain the best advice on the topics of government, temperance, abolition, trade, and domestic life. It might well add to such compositions such poetry and sentiment as now will constitute its best merit. Yet it ought to go straight into life with

the devoted wisdom of the best men in the land. It should be a degree nearer to the hodiernal facts than my writings are. I wish to write pure mathematics, and not a culinary almanac or application of the sciences to the arts. . . . I wish that we might make a journal so broad and great in its survey that it should lead the opinion of this generation on every great interest, and read the law on property, government, education, as well as on art, letters, and religion. A great journal people must read; and it does not seem worth our while to work with any other than sovereign aims. So I wish we might court some of the good fanatics, and publish chapters on every head in the whole art of living."

But experience had shown Emerson that the New England reformers, though excellent men for their purpose, might injure his magazine, and he wrote in 1842: —

"I do not like to put the 'Dial' into the hands of the Humanity and Reform Men, because they trample on letters and poetry; nor in the hands of the scholars, for they are dead and dry. . . . My main resource is to adopt the expedient of selections from old or foreign books, almost with the liberality to which Alcott would carry it; certainly to make Synesius or Lucian or Chaucer speak whenever a dull article is offered and rejected. So I will immediately consult 'Fabricius on Authors' for solid continent to fill up July withal."¹

¹ See Emerson's letter to Margaret Fuller, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, July, 1885, pp. 231, 232.

Very early among contributors to the "Dial," as he afterwards contributed to the "Massachusetts Quarterly," was Theodore Parker, in himself capable, like Brownson, of carrying a review on his own broad shoulders. His first great article appeared in the "Dial" for January, 1841,— "German Literature," — and drew from that excellent scholar, Convers Francis, this deserved praise: —

"Thanks, a hundred thanks, to you for your article in the last 'Dial,'—an article which has learning enough to make the fortune of a stout octavo, but in which the learning is far outdone by the riches of profoundly significant thought, and the beauties of exquisitely happy expression. Such pieces as this (but how few such can be expected) are just what is wanted to make the 'Dial' not only better than any other American journal (for that is not saying much), but equal to the best in Europe; it has that grasp of elaborate thought which takes up a subject with the easy power of a strong man; the whole mind moved to the composition of it. The hand of a giant soul is left impressed upon it. A friend said to me, 'If that article had appeared in the first number, it would at the outset have placed the "Dial" triumphantly high, above all cavil.' I think so too; and if the editors can in future furnish much such matter, they need not fear for their work that any 'Daily Advertiser' (which means a whole genus) can touch a hair of its head. The humor

at the beginning is capital; and the noble defence of German literature which follows must strike our foolish babblers dumb, and enlighten the wisest. Are not the 'Thoughts on Art' also admirable?¹ They seem to me to contain in a few pages more profound and striking truth on this beautiful subject than I have seen in whole volumes. They may call Emerson superficial, if they will; but let them show us a better piece of æsthetical thinking than that if they can; and how delightfully it is all said!"

The "Thoughts on Art," like the "Thoughts on Modern Literature" in the "Dial" for October, 1840, were Emerson's, but, like several of his contributions to the "Dial," have not been reprinted. This essay, so praised by Dr. Francis, contains a definition beyond and behind which it is scarcely possible to go: "The conscious utterance of thought, by speech or action, is Art." Emerson adds:—

"Art is the spirit's voluntary use and combination of things to serve its end. The will distinguishes it as spiritual action. Plato rightly said, 'Those things

¹ The best list of the contributors to the "Dial" is that published by G. W. Cooke in the "Journal of Speculative Philosophy" for July, 1885; but Emerson's articles are also listed by his biographer, Mr. Cabot, in the Appendix to his Memoir, pp. 695, 696. Alcott's contributions were neither very numerous nor very important, except the "Orphic Sayings." Parker was the most popular contributor.

which are said to be done by Nature, are indeed done by divine art.' Art, universally, is the spirit creative. It was defined by Aristotle, 'The reason of the thing, without the matter,' as he defined the art of shipbuilding to be, 'All of the ship but the wood.'

Distinctions like this were rather too profound for the readers of the "Dial," and even for Theodore Parker, who, commenting on the first two numbers (July and October, 1840) wrote to Dr. Francis: —

"To my mind the 'Dial' bears about the same relation to the 'Boston Quarterly' that Antimachus does to Hercules, Alcott to Brownson, or a band of men and maidens daintily arrayed in finery to a body of stout men in blue frocks, with great arms and hard hands and legs. . . . Carlyle thought that Brownson and A. Bronson Alcott were the same, and laughed not a little about the real Brownson, of whom he had heard only the 'new views' as old as Voltaire."¹

Mr. Alcott's longest contribution to the "Dial" appeared in April, 1842, just before he sailed for

¹ This last remark of Parker's concerning Carlyle is curious. It was made in 1843, soon after Parker had visited Carlyle at Chelsea, where he found him drinking whiskey punch with his brother John, and got into a dispute with him concerning Emerson's opinion of slavery, which Carlyle insisted was like his own. Parker convinced him to the contrary the next year by sending Emerson's Emancipation Address of 1844.

England; it is called "Days from a Diary," and contains many passages from those commonplace books which at this period his diaries were. He quotes much,—from Pythagoras, Behmen, Henry More, William Law, Porphyry, Coleridge, Emerson, and from his English friends Barham and Heraud,—of whose magazine he says: "It is catholic, free, philosophic; it speaks for universal man, not for sects nor districts, and breathes a charity humane and diffusive. It compares favorably with our 'Dial,' but is more various in its contents, and addresses a wider public." He also dwells on vegetable diet, and on his hope for a community such as he formed after his return from England. He says:—

June, 1841. "I shall leave for Vermont on Monday next. Lately I have been sent journeying to seek the members of that brotherhood whom God designs shall dwell together in his Paradise. The time is near when the soul's fabled innocency shall luxuriate as a visible fact rooted in the soil of New England, and scribes, wise even as the Hebrews of old, record their version of the Genesis of Man, and the peopling and planting of Eden." — *June 17.* "Bland the air, picturesque the scenery, of these Green Mountains. This is the Switzerland of our Republic. Yet over these primeval hills clothed in perennial verdure—these passes, whose sides are instinct with bleating sheep and lowing kine, or proudly

standing with the growths of ages — the wizard Trade has swept her wand of sorcery ; and on these shepherds and swineherds are visited the sordid and debasing vices of the distant towns they feed.

"I brought from our village a bag of wheaten flour for our table. Pythagorean in our diet, we make small demands on foreign products, but harvest our dust mostly from this hired acre. I would abstain from the fruits of oppression and blood, and am seeking means of entire independence. This, were I not holden by penury unjustly, would be possible. One miracle we have wrought nevertheless, and shall soon work all of them : our wine is water, — flesh, bread, — drugs, fruits ; and we defy meekly the satyrs all, and Æsculapius. The soul's banquet is an art divine. . . . This Beast named Man has yet most costly tastes, and must first be transformed into a very man, regenerate in appetite and desire, before the earth shall be restored to fruitfulness, and redeemed from the curse of his cupidity. Then shall the toils of the farm become elegant and invigorating leasures ; man shall grow his orchards and plant his gardens, — an husbandman truly, sowing and reaping in hope, and a partaker of his hope. Labor will be attractive ; life will not be worn in anxious and indurating toils ; it will be a scene of mixed leisure, recreation, labor, culture. The soil, grateful then for man's generous usage, debauched no more by foul ordures, nor worn by cupidities, shall recover its primeval virginity, bearing on its bosom the standing bounties which a sober and liberal providence ministers

to his need, — sweet and invigorating growths, for the health and comfort of the grower.”

At this time Emerson was editor of the “Dial,” as he continued to be, with the assistance of Thoreau, and with James Munroe as final publisher, until the magazine came to an end in 1844. During 1842–1843 Charles Lane and Thoreau spent some time canvassing for subscribers, and Horace Greeley advertised the “Dial” in his “New York Tribune” abundantly and gratuitously; yet of the five hundred copies printed, less than two hundred and fifty went to actual subscribers. In February, 1843, Miss Peabody, who still published it, said, “Little as the ‘Dial’ is subscribed for, it is very extensively read;” but even then the subscription list was diminishing. Emerson indorsed Miss Peabody’s promissory notes for the current expenses, and during his editorship no doubt paid for it \$300 or more.¹

It was in the spirit of the passages just quoted from Alcott’s diary of June, 1841, and not from the ordinary Fourieristic notions about attractions and destinies and co-operative housekeeping, that Alcott undertook his experiment at Fruitlands.

¹ G. W. Cooke, in the “Journal of Speculative Philosophy” (New York: D. Appleton & Co.) for July, 1885. See also the Emerson-Thoreau Correspondence in the “Atlantic” for May and June, 1892.

Emerson put his critical finger on its weak point when he said, "The fault of Alcott's community is that it has only room for one;" but he added, with that constant return to a high estimate of his inspired friend: —

"They say of Alcott, and I have sometimes assented, that he is one-toned, and hearkens with no interest to books or conversation out of the scope of his one commanding idea. Maybe so; but very different is his centralism from that of vulgar monomaniacs. For he looks with wise love at all real facts, at street faces, at the broad-shouldered long-haired farmer, at the domestic woman, at the kitchen, at the furniture, at the season as related to man, and so on. He can hear the voice which said to George Fox, 'That which others trample on must be thy food.' . . . And this is a just example of the true rule for choice of pursuit. You may do nothing to get money which is not worth your doing on its own account."

This was written in 1837, before Alcott had put in practice his extreme views on taxation and the wicked institution of government. In 1843 Emerson again notes in his journal, with that shrewd common-sense in which he resembled Franklin and Socrates, and which his friend so often lacked, notwithstanding his Connecticut breeding, —

"Alcott thought he could find as good a ground for quarrel in the State tax as Socrates did in the edicts of

the judges. Then, I say, 'Be consistent, and nevermore put an apple or kernel of corn into your mouth. Would you feed the Devil? Say boldly, "There is a sword sharp enough to cut sheer between flesh and spirit, and I will use it, — and not any longer belong to this double-faced, equivocating, mixed, jesuitical universe."' He characterized all argument in favor of ways of the world, or expediency, or things as they are, as a kind of desperation. But how much better his shiftlessness than others' worldliness! He is Nature's Abbot of the order of Capuchins. He was nettled at railroads and telegraphs. He thought with impatience that if those jobs were once done and ended, the intellect of America could be won to some worthy occupation. 'The day will come,' he said, 'when Hercules cannot be organized.'

In speaking of the Fruitlands experiment, Emerson had spoken of "projects that so often seem without feet or hands." This was a favorite figure whenever Emerson thought of Alcott and some of his other friends. "Alcott," he said, "is an intellectual Torso,—he has vision without any talent,—a colossal head and trunk without hands or feet; and I think we must say of him what Lessing said in 'Emilia Galeotti': 'Do you suppose, Prince, that Raffaele would not have been the greatest genius among painters, even though unfortunately he should have been born without hands?' How often we lament the

compensations of power, when we see talent suck the substance of the man! How often we repeat the disappointment of inferring general ability from conspicuous particular ability! But the accumulation on one point has drained the trunk; and we say, 'Blessed are they who have no talent.' " Alcott certainly had no talent for carrying on a community or managing a farm, nor even for selecting the persons who should make up his New England Paradise. His daughter Louisa, in her humorous adaptation of the facts concerning Fruitlands to the exigencies of a short story, has said many things justly as well as entertainingly. She quotes from the "Dial" the announcement of Messrs. Alcott and Lane (called by her "Lamb & Lion") concerning their enterprise, and particularly this passage, which may be read with a smile or a tear, as one feels inclined:—

"Ordinary secular farming is not our object. Fruit, grain, pulse, herbs, flax, and other vegetable products, receiving assiduous attention, will afford ample manual occupation, and chaste supplies for the bodily needs. It is intended to adorn the pastures with orchards, and to supersede ultimately the labor of the plough and cattle, by the spade and the pruning-knife. Consecrated to human freedom, the land awaits the sober culture of devout men. Beginning with small pecuniary means, this enterprise must be rooted in a reliance on the

succors of an ever-bounteous Providence, whose vital affinities being secured by this union with uncorrupted fields and unworldly persons, the cares and injuries of a life of gain are avoided. The inner nature of every member of the Family is at no time neglected. A constant leaning on the living spirit within the soul should consecrate every talent to holy uses, cherishing the widest charities. The choice library is accessible to all who are desirous of perusing these records of piety and wisdom. Our plan contemplates all such disciplines, cultures, and habits as evidently conduce to the purifying and edifying of the inmates."

The exact location of this farm — "liberated from human ownership" ostensibly, but really the property of Charles Lane — was about three miles from the village of Harvard, now on the railroad from Worcester to Nashua, and scarcely a mile from the nearest station, Still River. The distance from Boston is thirty miles, and from Concord scarcely twenty. It lies on a hillside sloping towards the river Nashua, and commanding a view of the mountains Wachusett and Monadnock, which are also visible from any high hilltop in Concord. Lane described it in a letter to Thoreau in a style more glowing than his prosaic nature generally permitted.¹ He said: —

¹ Miss Alcott, in giving this English enthusiast the title of "Timon Lion," would intimate that he was both severe and misanthropic; and indeed he seems to have been of a

"It is very remotely placed, without a road, surrounded by a beautiful green landscape of fields and woods. On the estate are about fourteen acres of wood, —a very sylvan realization, which only wants a Thoreau's mind to elevate it to classic beauty. The nearer little copse is designed as the site of the little cottages. Fountains can be made to descend from their granite sources on the hill-slope to every apartment, if required. Gardens are to displace the warm grazing glades on the south; and numerous human beings, instead of cattle, shall here enjoy existence. The farther wood offers to the naturalist and the poet an exhaustless haunt; and a short cleaning of the brook would connect our boat with the Nashua. Such are the designs which Mr. Alcott and I have just sketched, as, resting from planting, we walked round this reserve."

The date of this letter being June 7, 1843, it is evident that their planting was late; and Lane complained that there was much hard manual

hard nature, bent on carrying out his own theories, with little regard for the convenience of others. Emerson's respectful mention of him has already been quoted; but there was something in Emerson's own nature which recognized this severe type. At this date Emerson wrote: "Alcott and Lane are always feeling of their shoulders, to find if their wings are sprouting; but next best to wings are cowhide boots, which society is always advising them to put on. It is really Alcott's distinction that, rejoicing or desponding, this man always trusts his principle, whilst all vulgar reformers rely on the arm of money and the law."

labor,— “so much that, as you perceive, my usual handwriting is very greatly suspended.” We may suspect blisters from this expression, if this high-soaring Englishman could ever come down so low as to speak of blistered hands. He goes on,—

“We have only two associates in addition to our own families; our house accommodations are poor and scanty; but the greatest want is of good female aid. Far too much labor devolves on Mrs. Alcott. If you should light on any such assistant, it would be charitable to give it a direction this way. We may, perhaps, be rather particular about the quality. Though to me our mode of life is luxurious in the highest degree, yet generally it seems to be thought that the setting aside of all impure diet, dirty habits, idle thoughts, and selfish feelings is a course of self-denial scarcely to be encountered, or even thought of, in such an alluring world as this.”

The persons who actually belonged to the Fruitlands community, first or last, were (besides the Alcott family, then consisting of the husband, wife, and four daughters), the following persons: Abraham Everett, Charles Lane and his son William, with H. C. Wright for a short time; Isaac T. Hecker of New York, afterward well known as Father Hecker, and editor of “The Catholic World;” Christopher Greene and Samuel Larned of Providence; Joseph Palmer, Charles

Bowers, and the one feminine disciple, Anna Page. Robert Carter — a friend of the poet Lowell, and a lively but inaccurate writer — has spoken of the Fruitlands experiment¹ in language that may be quoted, though not always exact: —

“ No animal substance — neither flesh, fish, butter, cheese, eggs, nor milk — was allowed to be used at Fruitlands. They were all denounced as pollution, and as tending to corrupt the body and through that the soul. Tea and coffee, molasses and rice, were also proscribed, — the last two as foreign luxuries, — and only water was used as a beverage. Mr. Alcott would not allow the land to be manured, which he regarded as a base and corrupting and unjust mode of forcing Nature. He made also a distinction between vegetables which aspired or grew into the air, as wheat, apples, and other fruits, and the base products which grew downwards into the earth, such as potatoes, beets, radishes, and the like. These latter he would not allow to be used. The bread of the community he himself made of unbolted flour, and sought to render it palatable by forming the loaves into the shape of animals and other pleasant images. He was very strict, indeed rather despotic, in his rule of the community, and some of the members have told me that they were nearly starved to death there; nay,

¹ Published long after Mr. Carter's death by the late A. G. Browne in the "Century" Magazine for November, 1889. This article is cited by Dr. Tuke in his "Dictionary of Psychological Medicine," p. 421.

absolutely would have perished with hunger if they had not furtively gone among the surrounding farmers and begged for food."

Mr. Carter adds that the community at Fruitlands revived the Pythagorean, the Essenian, and the monkish notions of asceticism; while its founder, Alcott, maintained "that the evils of life were not so much social or political as personal, and that a personal reform only could reform them; that self-denial was the road to eternal life, and property an evil." The rejection of money and the adoption of ascetic notions of food and dress were common among the disciples of Alcott and Lane; and one of them, Edward Palmer, had published, in 1840, a pamphlet to show that money was the chief evil, and that the only way to reform the world was to abolish property. Commenting on these notions and on this singular community of Fruitlands, Dr. Tuke, in his last great work on insanity,¹ says:—

"Was Alcott insane? That such a man should induce others to imitate him and form a community, would

¹ Dictionary of Psychological Medicine (London: J. & A. Churchill, July, 1892), p. 421. Dr. Tuke visited America in 1886, and made the acquaintance of some friends and contemporaries of Alcott; but he seems to have derived most of his knowledge from the "Century" article of Robert Carter,—by no means the highest authority.

astonish us, were it not an oft-repeated fact in history. Other persons passed through very similar phases about the same period. I find no evidence whatever of mental disease, and regard such things as illustrations of peculiar psychical constitutions, which under remarkable upheavals of religious thought fell into eccentric courses, but did not become insane. A cold winter was the means of converting Mr. Alcott to ordinary notions of the world in regard to dress, and his following appears to have quickly dissolved."

The rigors of a New England winter promoted the dissolution of the Fruitlands community, but did not alone break it up. A lack of organizing power to control the steady current of selfishness, as well as the unselfish vagaries of his followers, was the real cause. Nothing, in fact, could be more miserable than the failure of this hopeful experiment. The family, which never numbered more than twelve, did not hold together more than six months; although at first, in the pleasant New England summer, all of them except Mrs. Alcott enjoyed their new experiences. On the birthday of little May Alcott, July 28, the child of three years was taken down by the whole household to the grove, where a rustic festival in her honor took place; she was crowned with flowers, and an ode, written by Mr. Alcott, was pronounced by him in celebration of the opening Paradise. His

daughter Louisa, then a girl of eleven, remembering in after years, as a child will, the personal characteristics and petty experiences of the community, said, in her "Transcendental Wild Oats:" —

"Brother Lion [Lane] domineered over the whole concern; for, having put the most money into the speculation, he was resolved to make it pay, — as if anything founded on an ideal basis could be expected to do so by any but enthusiasts! Abel Lamb simply revelled in the Newness, firmly believing that his dream was to be beautifully realized, and in time not only little Fruitlands, but the whole earth be turned into a Happy Valley. He worked with every muscle of his body, for *he* was in deadly earnest. He taught with his whole head and heart; planned and sacrificed, preached and prophesied, with a soul full of the purest aspirations, most unselfish purposes, and desires for a life devoted to God and man, too high and tender to bear the rough usage of this world."

Brook Farm appeared to Charles Lane very far from the ideal community that it seemed to George Ripley and his young associate, Dana. Writing to an English periodical, the "New Age," July 30, 1843, Lane said with Stoic severity: —

"Mr. Alcott and I returned last evening from a short visit to Boston, to purchase a few articles; and while

we were there, went out one evening to Roxbury, where there are eighty or ninety persons playing away their youth and daytime in a miserable, joyous, frivolous manner. There are not above four or five who could be selected as really and truly progressing beings. Most of the adults are there to pass 'a good time;' the children are taught languages, etc. The animals occupy a prominent position; there being no less than sixteen cows, besides four oxen, a herd of swine, a horse or two, etc. The milk is sold in Boston, and they buy butter, to the extent of five hundred dollars a year. We had a pleasant summer evening conversation with many of them, but it is only in a few individuals that anything deeper than ordinary is found. The Northampton community is one of industry; the one at Hopedale aims at practical theology; this of Roxbury is one of taste; yet it is the best which exists here, and perhaps we shall have to say it is the best which *can* exist. . . . I could send you a description of works and crops, — our mowing, hoeing, reaping, ploughing in tall crops of clover and grass for next year's manure, and various other operations. But if we knew how to double the crops of the earth, it is scarcely to be hoped that any good would come by revealing the mode. We will therefore say little concerning the sources of external wealth."

This may serve to indicate the ascetic demands of these reformers on their fellow-laborers in the vineyard. From Mrs. L. M. Child, in New York,

the next September, we get this glimpse of the two founders of Fruitlands:—

“A day or two after [Theodore] Parker left, Alcott and Lane called to see me. I asked, ‘What brings you to New York?’ ‘I don’t know,’ said Mr. Alcott; ‘it seems a miracle that we are here.’ Mr. Child and John Hopper went to hear a discussion between them and W. H. Channing. I asked Mr. Child what they talked about. ‘Lane divided man into three states,—the dis-conscious, the conscious, and the unconscious. The dis-conscious is the state of a pig; the conscious is the baptism by water; and the unconscious is the baptism by fire.’ I laughed, and said, ‘Well, how did the whole discussion affect your mind?’ ‘Why, after I had heard them talk a few minutes, I’ll be cursed if I knew whether I had any mind at all.’ J. H. stayed rather longer, though he left in the midst. He said they talked about mind and body. ‘What did they say?’ ‘Why, Channing seemed to think there was some connection between mind and body; but those Boston folks, so far as I could understand ’em, seemed to think the body was all a sham.’”

These were reporters too jocose to be trusted; but their jests represent well enough the common attitude, even of reformers, toward the enthusiasts of Fruitlands; for both Mr. Child and John Hopper (the son of Isaac Hopper, the Quaker philanthropist) were of the class termed by Mr. Lane “pro-

gressing beings." Mr. Alcott himself, in after years, would smile at the extremes of his act and thought in this period of earnest unreason; and he was not averse to tell the tragi-comical tale of the Harvard hill-farm looking down on the Nashua. Mrs. Caroline Sherman, of Chicago, more than thirty years after the Fruitlands failure, heard from Mr. Alcott its story as he came to view it in later years. She says: —

"One day at Concord Mr. Alcott consented to give his experience at Fruitlands; and for two hours he entertained the little company with the happiest of humor, as he told the story of his effort to realize an ideal community. Together with Charles Lane, he purchased a location on the north side of a sandy hill in Harvard, and started out with the idea of welcoming hospitably to their community any human being who sought admission. Mr. Alcott described the various sorts of quaint characters who came to live with them, lured by the charms of Utopia and Arcadia combined. Only a vegetable diet was allowed; for the rights of animals to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness formed a fundamental principle in their constitution. This not only cut them off from beef, but from milk and eggs. The milk belonged to the calf, — the chicken had a right to its existence as well as the infant. Even the canker-worms that infested the apple-trees were not to be molested. They had as much right to the apples as man had. Unfortunately, farm operations were not

started until well into June, and the only crop raised that was of value as dependence was barley; but the philosophers did not flinch at the thought of an exclusively barley diet. Now and then they gave a thought as to what they should do for shoes when those they now had were gone; for depriving the cow of her skin was a crime not to be tolerated. The barley crop was injured in harvesting, and before long actual want was staring them in the face. This burden fell heaviest upon Mrs. Alcott; for, as housewife, it was her duty to prepare three meals a day. They remained at Fruitlands till midwinter in dire poverty, all the guests having taken their departure as provisions vanished. Friends came to the rescue, and, concluded Mr. Alcott with a tone of pathos in his voice: 'We put our four little women on an ox-sled, and made our way to Concord. So faded one of the dreams of my youth. I have given you the facts as they were; Louisa has given the comic side in "Transcendental Wild Oats;" but Mrs. Alcott could give you the tragic side.'"

The tragic side was indeed very sad, and the final expulsion from this Paradise nearly cost Mr. Alcott his life. He retired to his chamber, refused food, and was on the point of dying from grief and abstinence, when his wife prevailed on him to continue longer in this ungrateful world. A little poem of his, written soon afterward, preserves the memory of this dark period. He calls it "The Return;" and when I first published it in

the Boston "Commonwealth," nearly thirty years ago,¹ I prefixed this motto from Horace, with his approval: —

*Patricæ quis exsul
Se quoque fugit?*

As from himself he fled,
Outcast, insane,
Tormenting demons drove him from the gate.
Away he sped,
Casting his woes behind,
His joys to find, —
His better mind.

Recovered,
Himself again,
Over his threshold led,
Peace fills his breast.
He finds his rest;
Expecting angels his arrival wait.

In one of his Boston conversations of 1851, Alcott, speaking of a dear friend who had encountered failure in one of his most cherished enter-

¹ These lines were printed in the Boston "Commonwealth" of May 8, 1863; and in this weekly newspaper also appeared (April 24, 1863) a long conversation held by Mr. Alcott in Boston, March 23, on the Transcendental Club and the "Dial," the report of which is worth reading. Other poems of Mr. Alcott appearing in the "Commonwealth" are "The Chase," June 12, 1863; "The Reaper," June 17; and in the same issue a continuation of that poem in a spiritual sense, — both having afterward appeared in one of Mr. Alcott's volumes.

prises, but also with the Fruitlands experience in his thoughts, made this observation, so true in his own case:—

“That is failure when a man’s idea ruins him, when he is dwarfed and killed by it; but when he is ever growing by it, ever true to it, and does not lose it by any partial or immediate failures, — that is success, whatever it seems to the world.”

The world at that time judged very differently, and for years afterward was apt to view this visionary in the most unfavorable light; which drew from Emerson a few years later a bitter commentary in his journal:—

“The plight of Mr. Alcott, the most refined and the most advanced soul we have had in New England, who makes all other souls appear slow and cheap and mechanical, — a man of such a courtesy and greatness that in conversation all others, even the intellectual, seem sharp, and fighting for victory, and angry (he has the unalterable sweetness of a Muse); yet because he cannot earn money by his pen or his talk, or by school-keeping or bookkeeping or editing, or any kind of meanness, — nay, for this very cause, that he is ahead of his contemporaries, is higher than they, and keeps himself out of the shop condescensions and smug arts which they stoop to, — or, unhappily, need not stoop to, but find themselves, as it were, born to, — therefore it is the unanimous opinion of New England judges

that this man must die! We do not adjudge him to hemlock or to garroting, — we are much too hypocritical and cowardly for that, — but we not less surely doom him, by refusing to protest against this doom, or combining to save him, and to set him in employments fit for him, and salutary for the State, or to the Senate of fine Souls, which is the heart of the State."

Mrs. Sherman's memory was at fault if she thought the Alcott family went on an ox-sled from Fruitlands to Concord,—their removal in this wintry fashion was only to a friendly house at Harvard, in which they were sheltered for a while before returning to Concord, where they had faithful friends to cherish them. It was soon after their return, in 1844, that Mr. Alcott makes this pathetic entry in his diary (I omit the date): —

"Apply to S——, school-committeeman, for the privilege of teaching the children of the primary school near Emerson's. But my services are declined. Are there, then, no avenues open to the sympathies of my townspeople? O God! wilt thou permit me to be useful to my fellowmen? . Suffer me to use my gifts for my neighbors' children, if not for themselves, and thus bless the coming, if not the present, generation. How long, O Lord! how long wilt thou try me, by this exclusion from the active duties of Church and State, and more than these, from the discharge of my duties to my neighbors, and my neighbors' children? To what ostra-

cism does the frank declaration of his opinion sometimes drive a candid and thoughtful man ! Yet far better this than to tamper with principles and their God. Even the little primary school was denied me, — but my own children are still within reach of my influences ; for which, and bread for their mouths, and raiment and shelter for their bodies, thou hast put it into the heart of some to spare me from begging these necessities. Blessed be poverty, if it make me rich in gratitude and thankfulness and a temper that rails at none ! But forgive me for intimating so much in spoken words.”

Then follows this prayer, addressed to that Person in whom this believer never ceased to have faith, — indeed, he believed far more deeply than many who took his name upon their lips publicly, and for a pretence made long prayers, standing at the corners of streets or in other conspicuous places, and looking down with scorn on this poor unsuccessful Utopian : —

“ Light, O source of light ! give Thou unto Thy servant, sitting in the perplexities of this surrounding darkness. Hold Thou him steady to Thee, to truth, and to himself ; and in Thine own due time give him clearly to the work for which Thou art thus slowly preparing him, proving his faith meanwhile in Thyself and in his kind !

“ Shall I say with Pestalozzi that I ‘ was not made by this world nor for it, — wherefore am I placed in it

if I was found unfit?' And the world that found him thus asked not whether it was his fault or that of another; but it bruised him with an iron hammer, as the bricklayer breaks an old brick to fill up a crevice."

Returned to Concord, but not to the Hosmer Cottage, Mr. Alcott took up his abode nearer to the Emerson estate, on the eastern edge of the village, and for a time lived in the family of Edmund Hosmer, a cousin of the other Hosmer family, whose tenant the Alcotts had been. He was a hard-working, independent farmer, with a large family,—a friend of Emerson's, and imbued with the Transcendental spirit. From there, in due time, the Alcotts removed to a new home, in an old house, which, with its sheltering hill, the occupants now named "Hillside," but which, when it passed into the hands of Hawthorne, a few years later, took the name of "Wayside,"—which it still holds. Here Mr. Alcott planted trees, made a terraced garden, built a pleasure for his children by the brookside, and in other ways beautified the unsightly place. While living there he gave his thought more steadily to public conversations, and henceforward came to be known as the Socratic talker of his time. He had made the acquaintance of young Lowell, the poet, with whom his radical opinions put him in

sympathy, and earlier drew forth that well-known sketch by Lowell:—

- “Hear him but speak, and you will feel
The shadows of the Portico
Over your tranquil spirit steal,
To modulate all joy and woe
To one subdued, subduing glow;
Above our squabbling business hours,
Like Phidian Jove’s, his beauty lowers,
His nature satirizes ours;
A form and front of Attic grace,
He shames the higgling market-place,
And dwarfs our more mechanic powers.
- “What throbbing verse can fitly render
That face so pure, so trembling-tender?
Sensation glimmers through its rest,
It speaks unmanacled by words,
As full of motion as a nest
That palpitates with unfledged birds;
’Tis likest to Bethesda’s stream,
Forewarned through all its thrilling springs,
White with the angel’s coming gleam,
And rippled with his fanning wings.
- “Himself unshaken as the sky
His words, like whirlwinds, spin on high
Systems and creeds pellmell together;
’Tis strange as to a deaf man’s eye,
While trees uprooted splinter by,
The dumb turmoil of stormy weather;
Less of iconoclast than shaper,
His spirit, safe behind the reach
Of the tornado of his speech,
Burns calmly as a glow-worm’s taper.”

It must have been before 1843 that Lowell made the observations of Alcott in his Socratic dialogues which gave the basis for this description. Many years later, and when Lowell would perhaps have dwelt more on the humorous side of these conversations (as he did slightly, to be sure, in the "Studies for Two Heads," from which the lines are taken), Emerson, always faithful to an opinion that he had once seriously formed, wrote in his journal of the year 1866:¹ —

"Last night in the conversation, Alcott appeared to great advantage, and I saw again, as often before, his singular superiority. As pure intellect, I have never seen his equal. The people with whom he talks do not ever understand him. They interrupt him with clamorous dissent, or what they think verbal endorsement of what they fancy he may have been saying, or with 'Do you know, Mr. Alcott, I think thus and so,' — some whim or sentimentalism, — and do not know

¹ Lowell says, for instance, in the latter part of the sketch of Alcott: —

"Our nipping climate hardly suits
The ripening of ideal fruits;
His theories vanquish us all summer,
But Winter makes him dumb and dumber."

The allusion perhaps is to the contrast of summer and winter at Fruitlands. The first of the "Two Heads" was intended for Margaret Fuller, to whom Lowell never could render justice.

that they have interrupted his large and progressive statement; do not know that all they have in their baby brains is incoherent and spotty; that all he sees and says is like astronomy, lying there real and vast, and every part and fact in eternal connection with the whole, and that they ought to sit in silent gratitude, eager only to hear more, to hear the whole, and not interrupt him with their prattle. It is because his sight is so clear, commanding the whole ground, and he perfectly gifted to state adequately what he sees, that he does not lose his temper when glib interlocutors bore him with their dead texts and phrases. . . . Power is not pettish, but want of power is. Alcott's activity of mind is shown in the perpetual invention and felicity of his language, the constitutionality of his thought apparent in the fact that last night's discourse only brought out with new conviction the fundamental thoughts which he had when I first knew him. The moral benefit of such a mind cannot be told. The world fades; men, reputations, politics, shrivel. The interests, power, future, of the soul beam a new day-spring. Faith becomes sight."

If now we go back thirty years, to those early days of the Alcottian conversation, we shall find Emerson no less clear and ardent in his tribute to his friend's gift; but then he had more hope that the careless world might respond to a genius so original and inspiring. In his journal for May 19, 1837, almost ten years before Lowell had

his glimpse of what Alcott could do, Emerson writes:—

“Yesterday Alcott left me, after three days spent here. I had lain down a man and had waked up a bruise, by reason of a bad cold, and was lumpish, tardy, and cold. Yet could I see plainly that I conversed with the most extraordinary man and the highest genius of the time. He is a man. He is erect; he sees, let whoever be overthrown or parasitic or blind. Life he would have and enact, and not nestle into any cast-off shell or form of the old time, and now proposes to preach to the people, or to take his staff and walk through the country, conversing with the school-teachers, and holding conversations in the villages. And so he ought to go, publishing through the land his gospel, like them of old time. Wonderful is his vision. The steadiness and scope of his eye at once rebukes all before it, and we little men creep about ashamed. It is amusing even to see how this great visual orb rolls round upon object after object, and threatens them all with annihilation, — seemeth to wither and scorch. Coldly he asks whether Milton is to continue to meet the wants of the mind, — and so of Bacon, and so of all. He is, to be sure, monotonous; you may say one gets tired of the uniformity. He will not be amused, he never cares for the pleasant side of things; but always Truth and the Origin he seeketh after.”

The Platonic conversation was indeed Alcott's great occasion for showing his powers of thought

and expression to his contemporaries. Whether they understood him or not, whether they interrupted him or not, whether they smiled at him or were inspired by him,—this was still his one great function after he ceased to be a schoolmaster. He learned the art in his school, but practised it everywhere, or anywhere that men would listen to him. As Lowell said,—

“Had he but lived in Plato’s day,
He might, unless my fancy errs,
Have shared that golden voice’s sway
O’er barefooted philosophers.”

He did indeed bear much sway, from 1836 onward, among the well-clad philosophers of Boston, Cambridge, and Concord. Writing in his journal, Aug. 7, 1837, Emerson says:—

“This morning Mr. Alcott and Mr. Hedge left me. Four or five days full of discourse, and much was seen. I incline to withdraw continually, as from a surfeit; but the stomachs of my wise guests being stronger, I strain my courtesy to sit by, though drowsy. In all conversations we have glimpses of the universe, perceptions of the soul’s omnipotence, but not much to record. I, who enjoin on Alcott records, can attain to none myself,—to no register of these far-darting lights and shadows, or any sketch of the mountain landscape which has opened itself to the eye. It would be a valuable piece of literature, could a report be made of

these extended and desultory but occasionally profound, often ornamented, often sprightly and comic dialogues; sinking some parts, fulfilling others, and chiefly putting together things that belong together. I would rather have a perfect recollection of all this, of all that I have thought and felt, than any book that can now be published."

Here we see, on the highest authority, what so many others have felt to be true,—the extreme difficulty of preserving the result of Alcott in conversation. Wordsworth, speaking of lonely meditation rather than of converse with others, has observed,—

"Tis the most difficult of tasks to keep
Heights which the soul is competent to gain."

This is still more true of those heights of thought and feeling which men of spiritual insight help us to attain. But a listener for many years to the conversations of Alcott (Mrs. E. D. Cheney, of Boston) made some notes which may be used to describe what these occasions often were:—

"My first recollection of Mr. Alcott is at one conversation heard in his house in Beach Street, between the years 1838 and 1840. I was a mere schoolgirl, and went with an older friend who admired and valued him. I was entirely befogged, and gained nothing from the conversation but a certain personal impression of dignity and power, which inclined me to hear him again

when the right time came. I did not hear him again for almost ten years, when I began to attend his conversations and make abstracts of them. In opening, he said: 'We must devote the first evening principally to forming acquaintance. We must grope and blunder, and in some moment the inspiring light will come to some mind, and perhaps four or five happy episodes will be all we shall get from the conversation.' 'Words, if rigidly adhered to, become tombs of thought;' whereupon some one suggested that then 'dictionaries are graveyards.' Mr. Alcott said we might possibly get into such deep waters of thought that we should drown therein, but he hoped not; 'at any rate, he would rather drown in a sea of ideas than of words.' Again, by way of commencement, he read Plato's parable of Man, as a figure with a hundred heads of bird and beast, which represented the desires; then the figure of a lion, which was Anger; and then the figure of a Man; and he who loves justice gives the rule to this man over the beasts. He then gave some phrases, such as: Instincts, which desire; Understanding, which apprehends; Fancy, which images; Reason, which comprehends; Imagination, which seizes truths; Conscience, which perceives laws; Inspiration, or intuition. Theodore Parker asked him to define Understanding and Reason. He declined, saying, 'God only can define; man can only confine.' 'Well, will you confine then?' said Parker. Mr. Alcott said: 'All language is fluent: a word means what we will have it mean at the time; it needs the whole experience of life to explain it, and

no definitions can make it convey the thought to one not in a condition to receive it.'

"While Parker admired Alcott and recognized his peculiar value, he was not helpful to him in conversation, on account of their different intellectual methods. Yet Parker would sum up the whole talk of an evening in a masterly manner, showing how each person had brought out some necessary phase of the question, and presenting such a curious contrast in his definite statement with the floating mist which had appeared before, as moved us all to laughter. He did so this evening, and closed by accepting Mr. Alcott's definition of the object of man's culture being 'to free him from institutions,' asking, 'What methods would help to this end?' Instead of answering this question, Mr. Alcott spoke generally, and said: 'I wish you constantly to draw me from the centre to the surface, into the region where men buy and sell. Here sits a man whose blessing or curse it is that he dwells in the region of the Ideal; he cannot come down to the region of the Understanding; he has no *common* sense. Will you not take his case kindly into consideration?'

"Among the company was a German of much learning, but sceptical and excessively critical, who once apologized to Mr. Alcott for perhaps having said too much and hurt the conversation. 'Oh!' said Mr. Alcott, very coolly, 'do not be troubled; perhaps on the whole you have helped as much as you have hindered.'

"Little justice has been done to the keen sagacity,

the fine perception of character, the wit, even the audacity, of Mr. Alcott's speech; which made his conversations not only elevating, but exhilarating, — for these traits were always in subordination to the prevailing quality of high spirituality, which left the deepest impression. I wrote at the time of hearing him: 'That atmosphere of thought was like sea-air to an invalid. Mr. Alcott's conversation was a great deal to me; it led me into the Universal, out of myself. It had the same effect that Genius always does. He was more genial, more humane, than I expected. There is a charm in his voice which, like the music of a song, diverts attention from the words. I feel like a child with him, and am quite sure that he will accept all with gentleness and forbearance.' At times he was a pure rhapsodist, and carried you along by the music of his thought and speech. Theodore Parker said: 'Sometimes Mr. Alcott talks like an angel.'

"I think he seldom prepared himself by writing, or made notes of what he wished to say or even to quote, though he sometimes opened the conversation by reading; but he sought to bring his mind into the right condition for fruitful meditation. He was wont to read his favorite authors, the philosophers Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus, etc., or his quaint old poets, — Quarles or Donne, Spenser or Herbert, — and then, as the day began to decline, he took his walk around the Common, letting the bracing air and the glow of the sunset tune his mind to harmony, and fill him with inspiration.

"When he was thus discoursing once on his favorite

theme of complexions, feeling a sensitiveness for my friends the Negroes, I said, 'Swedenborg says the Negroes are the most beloved of all the races of Heaven.' 'That is very kind in Mr. Swedenborg,' was the answer, which stopped all comment. But the most remarkable passage of arms that I remember was with the late William Greene. Colonel Greene was a master of logic, and almost rivalled Socrates in winding an adversary up into a complete snarl. Of course, he was antipathetic to Mr. Alcott. On one occasion Mr. Alcott described the 'demonic man,'—and it was point for point a portrait of William Greene (then Reverend, and not Colonel), who sat directly before him. 'The demonic man is strong; he has dark hair and eyes, his eye is full of fire; he has great energy, strong will. He is logical, and loves disputation and argument. The demonic man smokes, etc.' The company silently made the application; but Mr. Greene said, 'But has not the demonic man his value?' 'Oh, yes,' said Mr. Alcott, 'the demonic man is good in his place, very good,—he is good to build railroads; but I do not quite like to see him in pulpits, begging Mr. Greene's pardon.' Mr. Greene took the thrust pleasantly, but sharpened his weapons for a retort. On the first convenient occasion he had a string of questions arranged so artfully that, while beginning simply, they would lead to a *reductio ad absurdum*, if Mr. Alcott answered them frankly. Mr. Alcott replied with a simple affirmative or negative, as Mr. Greene had planned, until the company began to perceive his intention, and that if

the next question were answered as it must be, Mr. Alcott would be driven to the wall.

“The question was put; but instead of the simple answer, Mr. Alcott began to talk, and that most delightfully. He soared higher and higher, as if he had taken the wings of the morning, and he brought us all the glories of heaven. I believe none of us could tell what he said, but we listened with rapture. Mr. Greene sat with one finger crossed upon another, waiting for a pause to put in his question; but the time never came, his opponent was borne away in a cloud far out of sight. I always queried whether this was intentional or whether his good angel carried him away; but Louisa said, ‘Oh, he knew well enough what he was about.’

“To a person who was very much troubled about the Free Love movements, saying, ‘I ought to do something about them; what shall I do? I wish some one would tell me what to do,’ he quietly replied, ‘Meantime there is Providence.’

“While Mr. Alcott’s only means of earning money at this time was from these conversations, it was very hard for him to make a pecuniary bargain for them, and he was so unskilful in money matters that one year, in making out his circular, he had put the price of single tickets so low that it was cheaper to buy them all than a ticket for the course. He was very generous in giving free tickets to those who desired them, even those who added nothing to the pleasure of the company. I remember one woman, somewhat crazed in mind, who occasionally threw the company into convulsions of

laughter by her ill-timed remarks, but whom he bore with patiently, always giving her free tickets, and escorting her down to the North End after the conversation was over, because he did not think it was safe for her to go alone. With all his seeming unpracticality, he was not slipshod in his arrangements. He loved thoroughness, good form, good manners. He was never unpunctual either in opening or closing the conversation. He respected his audience, and treated them with justice.

"In 1851 Mr. Alcott managed his conversations in a novel way, which brought out his rare power of appreciating and delineating character. He proposed a series of six conversations of representative men, most of them living, and all of our own times. He spoke of the true American type as not having yet appeared, and introduced Daniel Webster as not a representative American, not combining all the races which are going to form the new type. He said: 'Nature meant to make a noble man of Webster; she built the forehead nobly, but the back head is too powerful even for that, and the crown is wanting. She put in four or five Romans, two or three Saxons, but not the Hebrew. On the plane of the memory and the understanding he is great, he deals wisely with affairs, with coarse material interests, but not in the imagination, not in the pure reason, not in the conscience. We do not go to Webster for metaphysics. No mother would ask him how to educate her child. Webster lacked the feminine. He was old too early, — and without the feminine we can have no

true manhood. Not until we get the feminine element in Congress, whether in a man or a woman, shall we have the right spirit there. Webster was the type of a conservative. There is a true conservatism, but in the popular sense, a conservative is the man behind himself and behind his times. He is a demonic man. (Probably Webster was the best type of what Alcott meant by the 'demonic man.') A characteristic of the great men of the last century, from Goethe to Webster, has been this duplicity, this divided nature. We see it in Byron, in Coleridge, — eminently in Carlyle. Coleridge did not sin like Webster, but he was also guilty of what prevented his doing the things of which he was capable. The serene single man is yet wanting.'

"Garrison represented the Liberal, on the second evening, and the conversation was carried on more by others than usual. Mr. Alcott spoke of the 'Liberator' as Mr. Garrison's diary and best exponent, and of its value as history. Theodore Parker was the third topic, and Mr. Alcott called him the representative of 'popular rights.' 'He is a great Saxon, with perhaps a little of the Roman. He speaks a thing because it is so, not because he will have it so. We have said all when we have called him "a man." Books and libraries serve him; he serves humanity. If Mr. Parker is not our priest, he indicates him. He is the silence of the priest, greater than his speech. He moves us not by his words alone, but by his port, manner, disposition. There is a soul alive deified in him. He is pre-eminently gifted to operate on the people's heart.'

"William Henry Channing was the subject of the next conversation. Of him Mr. Alcott said: 'He partakes more largely of the fluid element; he is liberated and freed, and is an enthusiast; he has not a great imagination, but a lively fancy. As Parker represents Rights, so he represents Love. True discrimination can come only from a genuine love. It is the paint for our canvas portrait. He only can truly paint the Devil who for the time loves him.' Of Dr. Channing he spoke as among men of sentiment, and summed up the conversation thus: 'It is character that does the work. We have one man here who knows how to do his work. He hits the nail on the head. It is not the hammer that hits the nail; it is the man that holds it.' Of the conversation on Mr. Emerson I have no record, but it was represented to me as very beautiful. Neither have I any abstract of the conversation on Margaret Fuller as the representative of Woman, but as a painful disappointment, — so that I sat in agony until I resigned the evening as hopelessly lost. It appears to have been taken out of Mr. Alcott's hands. He, however, spoke beautifully of Margaret Fuller, as always in private conversation; for it is a popular error to suppose that these two noble souls were not in cordial harmony of feeling, although so different in expression. Mr. Alcott summed up these conversations as a series of six pictures.

"Our first, Webster, was a colossal bronze statue.

"Our second, Garrison, was a phrenological head illuminated.

“ ‘ Our third, Parker, was a bold crayon drawing wanting in richness of coloring, but still a good crayon sketch, — we were pretty well satisfied with it.

“ ‘ Our fourth, Mr. Channing, was a profile.

“ ‘ Our fifth, Margaret Fuller, was only an outline with the features left out, and is left on the easel ; it is not yet painted.

“ ‘ Our sixth, Emerson, was a finely cut medallion, and when it was done we fell in love with it ourselves.

“ ‘ Our seventh, Dr. Channing, we hoped would be a miniature. It has not been quite perfect, but perhaps it is a miniature.’ ”

Seldom were Mr. Alcott's conversations well reported, for it needed a certain sympathy in the reporter to present them so as to bring out that which was really charming and significant, and to omit those vexatious interruptions and attempts to puzzle the philosopher to which Mrs. Cheney has referred. There is, however, one conversation held in Boston, December, 1849, which was suitably recorded by a person every way equal to it (Miss Ariana Walker), which Mr. Alcott afterward printed in his "Concord Days," and which may here be cited in part. There were present, besides other persons not necessary to mention, Lowell, the poet, Miss Bremer, the Swedish novelist, and Mrs. Cheney. Its topic was "Temperament and Complexion," concerning which Emerson

somewhere said: "He had a passion for the blond complexion. He fancied that the dark complexion was a remainder of brutish nature; he could never forget this." He began this Wednesday evening by saying that perhaps he had dwelt too much on the symbol of color, but conceived himself borne out in all he had said.

"The Greeks held that a brown complexion betokened courage, and those who had fair skins were called children of light and favorites of the gods. And the gods themselves were demonic or divine, as tempered by darkness or light, — the gods Infernal, the Midgods, the Celestials. So Christian art has painted Satan dark and Christ fair. And late experiments on the sunbeam showed that dark substances imprison the rays, these absorbing more and delivering less. The more of sun, so much the more of soul; the less of sun, of passion more, and the strange fire. He fancied black eyes were of Oriental descent, — were tinged less or more with fairer hues in crossing West. People of sandy hair and florid complexions were of Northern ancestry. The fusion of the various races was now taking place, blending all, doubtless, into a more harmonious and beautiful type. He asked if there did not lurk in the fancy, if not in our atoms, a persuasion that complexion, like features, voice, gait, typified and emblazoned personal traits of their possessors, — if the rhetoric of morals and religion did not revel in like distinctions. 'Handsome is that handsome does.'

Beauty was the birthright of all, if not their inheritance. It was shame that brought deformity into the world. Every child accused he knew not whom for any blemish of his. 'Why not mine the happy star too?' Still some trait was insinuated and stamped upon the embryonic clay. Ebony, alabaster, indigo, vermilion, — the pigments were all mingled as purity or passion decreed. Types were persistent, family features standing strong for centuries, and perpetuating themselves from generation to generation. Place the portraits of a long line of ancestors on the walls, one's features were all there, with the slight variations arising from intermarriage, degrees of culture, calling, climate.

'Our faces are our coats of arms.'

"Eyes were most characteristic. These played the prime parts in life, — eyes and a voice. Eyes were a civility and a kingdom; voice, a fortune. There was a culture, a fate in them, direful, divine. Voice classifies us. The harmonious voice tells of the harmonious soul. Millions of fiends are evoked in a breath by an irritated one. A gentle voice converts the Furies into Muses. The highest saint is not he who strives the most violently, but he upon whom goodness sits gracefully, whose strength is gentleness, duty loved because spontaneous, and who wastes none of his power in effort; his will being one and above temptation. True love says, 'Come to my embrace; you are safer with me than you were with yourself, since I am wise above knowledge, and tasting of the apple.' The sequel is

bliss and peace. But after fascination comes sorrow, remorse. The touch of the demonized soul is poison. Read Swedenborg's Hells, and beware of demonized eyes. (I never saw any one who seemed to purify words as Mr. Alcott does; with him nothing is common or unclean.)

"After a surprising statement of his views on Swedenborg, Miss Bremer asked more questions about Mr. Alcott's definition of an enthusiast, adding, 'Christ then, if we speak of him as a man, was an enthusiast.'

"Mr. Alcott, smiling, said: 'Yes, the divinest of enthusiasts, surrendering himself entirely to the instincts of the Spirit; he might safely do so, being holy, whole, inspired throughout all his gifts, his whole Personality, — the divine fire pervaded every part; therefore he was the celestial man.'

"The conversation here turned upon Nature, in some way which I do not recollect, and Mr. Alcott spoke of the great mission of the prophet of Nature,

'The public child of earth and sky.'

"'Nature,' he said, 'was more to some persons than others; they standing in closer relation to it.'

"'But Nature,' said Miss Bremer, 'is not wholly good.'

"'No,' said Mr. Alcott; 'there is something of Fate in her, too, as in some persons. She, too, is a little bitten.'

"The expression seemed to amuse her; for she repeated it several times, laughing.

“Mr. Alcott then said that ‘Nature was not wholly sane. It was given to the celestial man alone to take from her only what was salutary, as it was the Nemesis of the demonic man to take what was hurtful. Bees gathered honey from all flowers.’

“James Russell Lowell asked ‘if bees did not sometimes secrete poisonous honey.’

“Mr. Alcott said he ‘believed they did, but only when wholesome flowers were denied them.’

“Miss Littlehale suggested that ‘honey was not poisonous to the bees, but to men only,’ and Mr. Lowell allowed that it was not. Miss Bremer now returned to the word ‘enthusiast.’ She said Mr. Alcott had defined it well as ‘divine intoxication.’

“Mr. Alcott spoke of the ‘celestial, or unfallen, man, as not making choice of good; he was chosen rather, elected, — deliberation presupposed a mixed will, a temptation and a lapse.’ He then read from Plotinus a beautiful passage which seemed to puzzle Miss Bremer, who was questioning in her mind the distinctions between Virtue and Innocence, or Holiness, — which Mr. Alcott had discriminated clearly. Some one then inquired, ‘How can we trust our instincts, since these have been so differently educated?’

“Mr. Alcott said ‘they had been rather overborne by the appetites and passions. It was the tragedy of life that these were obscured so soon, and the mind left in confusion. The child was more of an enthusiast than the man, ordinarily. And then so many were born old: even in the babe one sometimes sees some ancient

sinner. Youth is so attractive because still under the sway of instinct. The highest duty is musical, and sings itself. Business, lusts, draw men downwards. Yet were life earnest and true to the instincts, it would be music and song. Life was too much for most. No one was always an enthusiast. It was in the golden moments that he was filled with the overflowing divinity. The blissful moments were those when one abandons himself to the Spirit, letting it do what it will with him. True, most persons were divided, there were two or more of them, — a Deuce distracting them, and they in conflict with evils, or devils. Yet what is the bad but lapse from the good, — the good blindfolded?’

“ ‘Ah, Mr. Alcott!’ said Miss Bremer, laughing, ‘I am desperately afraid there is a little bit of a devil, after all.’

“ ‘One’s foes are of his own household,’ said Mr. Alcott; ‘if his house is haunted, it is by himself only. Our Choices are our Saviors or Satans.’ He closed the conversation by reading from ‘Paradise Regained’ a description of the banquet spread by Satan for Christ; also the lines in praise of Chastity, from ‘Comus,’ whose clear, statue-like beauty always affects me powerfully.”

In a series of conversations on Self-knowledge, held at Boston in 1848, Emerson, Thoreau, Theodore Parker, William Henry Channing, James Freeman Clarke, Elizabeth Peabody, Mrs. Cheney, and other early Transcendentalists took part. One evening, speaking of the domestic relation and the

relation of Christ thereto, Mr. Alcott said: "It was not an ascent from the lowest states, but a descent from that highest state which the Christian world ascribed to Jesus. Christians had conceived him as a husband or father in a human sense. The poetry and piety of Christian devotees has always spiritualized these relations."

"*Mrs. Cheney.* I suppose you have this meaning, — that Jesus dwelt in that spiritual state where he had all the worth of the domestic relation without its form.

"*Mr. Thoreau.* The difficulty is that human love is partial, — I should not call it love. Love is the action of the whole being in its intensest form.

(The conversation here took the form of a discussion on the true means of regenerating the world.)

"*W. H. Channing.* I represent the multitude, and insist that no perfect couple, no perfect household, no perfect being, can be formed alone; and if they could be, that were no help to society.

"*Mr. Alcott* insisted strongly on this very matter of domestic life, as the initial and complement of the community. The family is the seminary of society; and good housekeeping, like worship, is divine.

"*Mr. Channing.* Then I shall say, Scandal is divine. This couple in the pretty cottage on the hillside, which I heartily commit to the flames, cannot bring up your well-born child without some stain. The maiden will see a lover round the corner, will ride in omnibuses, and commit all manner of follies.

"*J. W. Browne.* How many homes are fit for the Son of Man? He must be worse off than the foxes and the beasts of prey before he can have place to lay his head.

"*Mr. Alcott.* Yes, if the beast in the man only burrows there. Then what is the house but a den?

"*Mr. Thoreau.* If doves are there, would it not be a nest?

"*Mr. Channing.* I thank God for the fable of Adam and Eve, which I choose to believe in, though not quite sure whether I do believe in it as a fact.

"*Mr. Alcott.* So much the deeper its significance, if it be symbolical of the lapse from purity in all souls, and the need of a redeemer to restore them to holiness.

"*J. F. Clarke.* Let me try to reconcile both views. No couple can begin the work alone. I was struck with this in reading the story Silvio Pellico tells of his prison-life. One might say the thought of that book was the power of the lonely soul to live with God in solitude. But through the little deaf-mute, the drunken prisoner, etc., we see that he was actually in closest contact with man, — that it was through love of man that he came to God and to himself. Much is implied in the phrase 'going about doing good;' and still more when it reads 'going about *being* good.'

"*Mr. Alcott.* And more yet if we say 'being good at home,' as the prerequisite to all the rest."

Mr. Alcott held in 1850 a series of conversations on "The Times," in which Emerson took a

prominent part, and where Garrison, Miss Bremer, Mrs. Alcott's cousin Sewall, Miss Peabody, W. H. Channing, etc. were present. They began February 11, and were opened by Mr. Alcott, with the reading of George Herbert's poem, "Man." He then said:—

"The times are the tides of thought setting through persons and affairs; Genius is their representative, great men are the tidings. A marked aspect of our day is its recovery and recognition of past times and great names, — of Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Behmen, Shakspeare, Goethe; and some moderns are becoming of new account. The social problem seems just now to be in the ascendant, — social reconstruction is aimed at. There is the social and the individual problem, being both socialist and individualist, and characterized by others as the one bias or the other had ascendancy.

"*Miss Bremer.* What do you mean by the individual problem?

"*Mr. Alcott.* To ascertain by what combination of social forces perfect men may be produced.

"*R. W. Emerson.* I have little skill or experience in public conversations, and am slow to take a responsible part in them. If we attempt to picture our times, we must be merely tentative, for the same man has many different opinions concerning his own time. We may touch a point here and there, but have not power to draw the whole curve. Once in a while — a thousand years — there comes a man able to recognize both sides

of the equation. Schelling was such a man; his word was 'The Ideal is the Real,' and that is still a key to our period. We talk of amelioration, — it is the thing we sow and till so pleasantly in our gardens. Van Helmont took a green pincushion fruit, and educated the pear. So we trace the amelioration of races. Our modern books of science all teach this, — Humboldt's 'Cosmos,' 'Vestiges of Creation,' etc. The difficulty is to find a work central enough for the reformer to do. He would reform by means of the Church, but his church needs reforming first of all; he would educate, but the children's brains are not good material: how shall he get better subjects? We find that society cannot act, the Church cannot act; thus the individual is stripped of one social relation after another; he has proved too much, — if he has saved the individual, he has lost society. Look at the novels of the day. We have stronger, better tales than ever before, — stories in which great problems are stated. Take the novel of 'Jane Eyre.' The question there may be settled in two ways. Rochester stands for individualism; he must be satisfied, he has a right to happiness, — let the laws and conventions go. But Jane settled it in her way, — the conventions must stand, the world is not to be forgotten. Other novels present the same question with less vigor and energy.

"*W. L. Garrison.* I wish we had some specific theme. Do we meet as literary men, or men of science, or reformers? In any one way we might consider the times and discuss them profitably. My way would be

to consider the wants of the age, the organic sins of the country ; we should all be reformers. We need to think more of humanity, not of man physiologically, but spiritually, as a brother. There is Carlyle's portrait (pointing to it). I would like to turn that picture to the wall.

“ *Mr. Alcott.* Carlyle is not to be given up ; he has brought out strongly an element which all must admit, — Fatalism ; the fate that underlies all things he has well described. He has not stated both sides and balanced them, but he has forcibly presented that side.

“ *Mr. Emerson.* I regret that the frolicsome expression of his thought, in which Mr. Carlyle allows himself, should be so offensive to many of us ; but I must say for him that the thing above all others which he hates is sham or pretence of any kind. He is thoroughly honest and sincere ; cannot endure rose-pink sentimentality ; and being rather a splenetic man, his indignation has been often called forth by the speeches at Exeter Hall. He has talked almost angrily in this vein for a long time, and I am glad he has now fairly expressed it and got it out of him. I hope he will now be ready to talk about something else.

“ *Mr. Garrison.* We must remember the brotherhood of man ; to feel that other men are ourselves. Here is poor Quashee, whom Carlyle attacks. But am I not Quashee for the time ? He who makes faces at humanity does it at me.

“ *Mr. Alcott.* Well, cannot you make a superior face at him ?

" *S. E. Sewall*. The discovery of gold in California points to what is a marked feature of our times, — the universal desire for money ; and this is to be censured and diminished.

" *Mr. Emerson*. Has Mr. Sewall ever seen any man so rich as he would wish him to be? My wish is to see man in possession of the elements of Nature ; and this universal love of wealth is a tribute to the birthright of man in an inheritance so rich and vast. It is a very poor approximation to philosophy, but still it is an approximation.

" *Mr. Alcott*. Our age is not specially distinguished in this respect from others. The desire for wealth has its good side also. California, with all its greed of gold, will become poetical ; but what men desire is not the true wealth ; although commerce has been and is our most adventurous missionary and civilizer. Trade imports things which minister to the lower nature ; but we want an importation of all good things, so as to form the perfect man and the great nation. Let the Oriental Scriptures come to us as well as the silks, the tea, and the diamonds, — let them be translated for the common benefit of mankind, so that we may trace the stream of inspiration to its sources. This is already one result of the modern spirit of travel and trade, as we see by the translations made in India, and dedicated to Warren Hastings.

" *Mr. Emerson*. Can we discuss all Mr. Garrison's themes in a single evening? I am a countryman, and I am struck with the faces I see around me. I do not

often meet such a company. Shall we not throw off reserve and give our frank and private thoughts? I long to propose the game of questions, and to draw every one out. There is my friend, Parker Pillsbury, — why will not he give his thought of the times?"

Mr. Alcott then spoke of the family as the seminary of society and the nursery of the individual man; and Mr. Emerson, alluding to Miss Bremer's novels of domestic life, and particularly "The Neighbors," gave an occasion for the Swedish novelist to speak.

"*Miss Bremer.* To form the perfect man is the great problem of America; but when he shall come, what is he to do? Must he not first be true to himself, and next, seek to enter into right relations with the Deity? My great countryman, Swedenborg, has spoken of the marriage of the soul to God, — marriage being his highest symbol. As for human marriage, that did not so much concern her" (smiling).

In the next week's conversation, which took place at the rooms of the newly organized "Town and Country Club," Emerson resumed his remarks upon the times, which, he said, seemed to apologize and be ashamed of themselves; they sit upon the anxious seat and utter their confession. He then went on: —

"We may say that the times are in the men, — events and men seem to be convertible, The men be-

come apotheosized into events, and are mythological. If we could have intimate biographies of our leading men of affairs, — Rothschild, Astor, Webster, Captain Sutter, and Colonel Fremont, — we should find in them the secret of our times, the reasons for what they did. All the materials are always present, and truth is always true to itself. This fact holds good in the physical world, and that is an emblem of the social. We say our times have not religion, as we say we have not sunshine when it rains; but the rain itself is a superlative effect of the sun; and so, while we depart from the forms once called religious, our very departure may be all the more religious. It is the very tragedy of every life, that it seeks to accomplish its ends by materials inadequate. Its powers are unfitted to the whole of life. But to know what is our own work, to see the leading of all nature — its polarity — and resolutely to follow that, — this is the safe, dignified, certain way of work; and this insures success, for every man has his leading. He is the greatest man and belongs to all times, who holds relation to duty, and acts from that. But it is surely a man's duty to be true to his own polarity. Man was born for victory, and if he fails, it is because he ought to fail, — because he has not wisely used his material. If he is a wise man, he will be glad to fail, and thus learn the lesson, for victory, now or hereafter; for we love to fancy the human soul returning and renewing its work, as in the Oriental doctrine of pre-existence.

“ *Mr. Alcott.* Never was there so much attention paid

to the multitude as now ; but we wish to bring them into unity. The few have always led the many, and must still lead them. Only a saint can paint a saint. But if I must attempt a stroke, I will mention among his qualities a certain delicacy, a reserve from lower things at first ; and if afterwards he is drawn into affairs, his behavior therein is the more efficient and beautiful. We see this in the life of our most saintly man.

“ *Mr. Emerson.* We may define a saint intellectually as one who sees truth not in detached portions, but connectedly, — who sees the relation of ideas to each other, whether he expresses this relation in words or otherwise. The common opinion seems to be that he who expresses most is the greatest man. Shakspeare, perhaps, had not seen more than others, only he knew how to speak it out in forms of poetry. But truly the great man is the man of greatest power, whether he puts it in words or not.

“ *Miss Bremer.* Could not the saint be a farmer, a peasant?

“ *Mr. Emerson.* Certainly ; but we each look for him in the occupation which is not our own. That is the confession of our deficiencies ; we overrate the merit of others, and they overrate our class. Just as the boys say, ‘One is afraid, and t’other darsn’t.’ Goethe said that every one wishes to be by himself, and yet to be absorbed in the multitude. Every one is a sovereign and a democrat, and our problem is to reconcile these two tendencies. I conceive that God has marshalled all men each to his own place ; if we

could see his plans as geometry, we should find it to be so. We are all able, we all have vision, but some are near-sighted, and some see farther.

"*Theodore Parker* (summing up the whole conversation in his masterly way). Our difficulty this evening has been in a confusion as to the meaning of terms; we need some definition of each before we go farther.

"*Mr. Emerson*. If this company were a class in logic, and this (pointing to Mr. Alcott) were the professor's chair, it would indeed be so. But in a free and general conversation the object is rather to draw forth remarks. Our English friend, Mr. Greaves, wrote over his mantel before his conversations, 'Let every one freely offer his own opinions, but let no one remark upon another's.'

"*Mr. Parker*. In such conversations the result could be told in the words of Scripture, — 'The multitude separated, and no man knew wherefore they came together.'"

This comment of Parker was one often made by those who attended these conversations without fully entering into their spirit. They were sometimes wondrously successful, — sometimes failures, partial or complete, according to the presence or absence of persons who could not or would not take Mr. Alcott at his best. It often happened, however, that he was not at his best, nor could he calculate with certainty on his own genius.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONCORD IDYL RENEWED. — ANTISLAVERY DAYS.

PAINFUL as the awakening was from the dream of Arcadia at Fruitlands, and deep as Alcott's humiliation in returning to Concord must have been, there were alleviations in the bitter lot. There dwelt his unshaken friend, Emerson, with his young children, of an age to be companionable to the Alcott girls, who were indeed eight or ten years older. There was Thoreau in his cabin at Walden; Hawthorne, in the Old Manse; and Ellery Channing,

“In his small cottage on the lonely hill,
Where like a hermit he must bide his time;”

and thither came not unfrequently Margaret Fuller, or William Henry Channing, or James Lowell, or Wendell Phillips, or James Freeman Clarke; while George Curtis, fresh from the Arcadia of Brook Farm, with his brother Burrill, abode as shepherds on the hills, or labored as swains in

the meadows of Concord, playing the flute with Thoreau, or singing in sweet manly voice,—

“When shall we meet again,
Dearest and Best?
Thou going easterly,
I going west.”

It was an idyllic period once more. Fresh interests were springing up, as these hopeful youths and maidens and these fair children joined in the dance of life, for which Concord then and in years afterward offered its simple and rural felicities. Emerson alone would have been attraction enough to Alcott; but Emerson encircled by these friends and guests made a sort of court, fit for the “tender, trusting sage” from Connecticut, of whom Channing then wrote,—

“I know the splendors of the great,
The blazing halls, the ruby wine;
But in thy truth is an estate
Not all their fancies could combine.”

Emerson's unique position among mankind, and especially towards such as were of the same household of faith and to the wandering and unfriended amid their fellows, is worthy of a word here, though often touched upon by those who truly knew him. Channing, in his “Wanderer” said of his hermit, frequenting Emerson's house:—

“Not always went he lonely; for his thought
Retained the touch of one whose guest he was, —

A large and generous man, who on our moors
(Though fittest to have sung at Persian feasts,
Or been the prince of Afric, or the lord
Of all the genii in the Arab chant)
Still dwelt among us as the sage he was;
Sage of his days, patient and proudly true, —
Whose word was worth the world, whose heart was pure.
The poorest wretch that ever passed his door
Welcome as highest king, or fairest friend,
To all his store, and to the world beside.
And in his tent sometimes our hermit sat,
Listening discourse most welcome, from the dame
Rarest in shooting darts of wit and love.”

Strikingly faithful is this picture, as seen by young Hotham, from whose experience it was sketched. It was no less true to the relations of Alcott, the senior, with Emerson and his sincere and queenly wife,—to whom, in his own book of Sonnets, Alcott addressed these playful verses:

“Then I recall thy salient, quick wit,
Its arrowy quiver and its supple bow, —
Huntress of wrong! right well thine arrows hit,
Though from the wound thou see'st the red drops flow:
I much admire that dexterous archery,
And pray that sinners may thy target be.”

Thoreau and Channing sometimes complained that their intercourse with Emerson was now and then dashed with coldness on his part; and indeed there was a reserve and superiority in him that ever and anon placed an infinite distance between him and his companion. He once said to Chan-

ning, "I seem to have a fatal power of imposing silence on others." Alcott, least of all his friends, had occasion to feel this estranging quality in Emerson, for these two met on a higher level than others; yet it did not wholly escape the insight of Alcott, who was as quick to perceive the nature of a person as he was slow to act or even judge unfavorably upon such perceptions. What Emerson thought of Alcott has been cited; but hear him again:—

"I was accustomed to characterize Alcott in England by saying that he was the one man I had met who could read Plato without surprise. I shall write on his tomb, 'Here lies Plato's Reader.' Read he can, with joy and *naïveté* inimitable; and the more the style rises, the more natural and current it seems to him. 'Here lies the Amateur.' Of Alcott, it is plain to see that he never loses sight of the order of things and thoughts before him. One thing I used to tell him,—that he had no senses. And it is true that they are with him vehicular, and do not constitute a pleasure and a temptation by themselves. We had a good proof of it this morning. He wanted to know why the boys waded into the water after pond-lilies. 'Why, because they will sell for a cent apiece, and every man and child likes to carry one to church for a Cologne bottle.' 'What?' said he; 'have they a perfume? I did not know it.' Saint Francis rode all day along the border of the Lake of Geneva; at night, hearing his com-

panions speak of the lake, he inquired 'What lake?' 'T is like Alcott's inquiry about the lilies." (1847.)

"Alcott's conversations shone with light; betrayed such organic wisdom, such clear intuitions, that the mind of his companion was cleared and satisfied, and while the conversation lasted never doubted his perpetual ability. But on any occasion in which Alcott was to present to any company his views on any leading topic, though chosen by himself, he usually failed to satisfy; he talked at large, but without concentration, and left his hearers without result. Especially this happened whenever he attempted to write. He wrote a great deal. He valued his writing, and did not seem to note that he had omitted his central thought. I said to him, 'A great man formulates his thought. Who can tell what you exist to say? You at least ought to say what is your thought, what you stand for.' He looked about a little, and answered that 'he had not a lecture or a book; but if Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Socrates, Behmen, Swedenborg were to meet in this town, he should not be ashamed, but should be free of that company.' It was well said, and I know not whom in this country they would ask for so readily. Yet I replied that all these were exact persons, severe with themselves, and could formulate something. I proposed to lock him up in prison, so that he might find out his dogma. . . .

"I shall go far and see many before I find such an extraordinary insight as Alcott's. In his fine talk last evening he ran up and down the scale of powers with

as much care and precision as a squirrel the wires of his cage; is never dazzled by his means or by any partiality; and a fine heroic action or a poetic passage would make no impression upon him, because he expects heroism and poetry in all. Ideal purity the poet, the artist, the man, must have. I have never seen any person who so fortifies the believer, so confutes the sceptic. And the almost uniform rejection of this man by men of parts (Carlyle and Browning inclusive) and by women of piety might make one despair of society. If he came with a cannonade of acclaim from all nations, as the first wit of the planet, these masters would receive him, and he would sustain the reputation; or if they could find him in a book a thousand years old, with a legend of miracles appended, there would be churches of disciples. But now they wish to know whether somebody did not hear from somebody, etc., etc." (1855.)

It was the year after Mr. Alcott's return to Concord from Fruitlands that Thoreau took his axe to the Cove on Walden Pond which now goes by his name,¹ and established his "community of one" by that fair water. He cut the trees for his cabin timbers in Emerson's grove, and Alcott

¹ History sometimes repeats itself. More than twenty years after Thoreau abandoned his cove, a young student, Edmund Stuart Hotham, from northern New York, came and built a cabin nearer Walden, and spent a winter there studying divinity. He is the "hermit" mentioned by Channing in his "Wanderer."

After some delay in finding a place for the wife and children, Mr. Adams, in 1861, bought an old house, very considerably built on the Lexington road, which had been occupied before time by an innkeeper & a tavern, as a place for a school. It was the oldest house available in the County of Hampshire west of the "great" river in front of the house, where a few years later Mr. Adams placed them and his carriage, and he made it one of the most comfortable of houses, until he gave it up in 1866.

[illegible]

by rebuilding the Orchard House on the next estate, which was so much admired by Mrs. Child at her visit in 1876. It was this Wayside house (called by Alcott "Hillside") which Hawthorne afterward occupied, rebuilt, and added the tower which now overlooks the scene. But when George Curtis lived in Concord, and described a "Symposium" at Emerson's house, Hawthorne was still living in the Old Manse, and Alcott occupied what is known as the Hawthorne place. Curtis's description, written for the "Homes of American Authors," is worth quoting:—

"It was in the year 1845 that a circle of persons of various ages, and differing very much in everything but sympathies, found themselves in Concord. Toward the end of the autumn Mr. Emerson suggested that they should meet every Monday evening through the winter in his library. Hawthorne, who then occupied the Old Manse; the inflexible Henry Thoreau, a scholastic and pastoral Orson, then living among the blackberry-pastures of Walden Pond; Alcott, then sublimely meditating impossible summer-houses in a little house on the Boston road; George Bradford, an enthusiastic agriculturist and Brook Farmer, then an inmate of Mr. Emerson's house, who added the genial cultivation of a scholar to the amenities of the natural gentleman; a sturdy farmer-neighbor [Edmund Hosmer], who had bravely fought his way through inherited embarrass-

ment to the small success of a New England husbandman ; two city youths, George and Burrill Curtis, ready for the fragments from the feast of wit and wisdom ; and the host himself composed the club. Ellery Channing, who had that winter harnessed his Pegasus to the 'New York Tribune,' was a kind of corresponding member. The news of this world was to be transmitted through his eminently practical genius ; and the club deemed itself competent to take charge of tidings from all other spheres. I went the first evening, very much as Ixion may have gone to his banquet. The philosophers sat dignified and erect. There was a constrained but very amiable silence, which had the impertinence of a tacit inquiry, seeming to ask, 'Who will now proceed to say the finest thing that has ever been said?' It was quite involuntary and unavoidable, for the members lacked that fluent social genius without which a club is impossible. It was a congress of oracles on the one hand, and of curious listeners on the other. I vaguely remember that the Orphic Alcott invaded the Sahara of silence with a solemn 'Saying,' to which, after due pause, the honorable member for Blackberry Pastures responded by some keen and graphic observations, while the Olympian host, anxious that so much material should be spun into something, beamed smiling encouragement upon all parties. But the conversation became more and more *staccato*. Hawthorne, a statue of night and silence, sat a little removed, under a portrait of Dante, gazing imperturbably upon the group ; and as he sat in the shadow, his dark hair and

eyes and suit of sables made him, in that society, the black thread of mystery which he weaves into his stories ; while the shifting presence of the Brook Farmer played like heat lightning around the room. I recall little else, but a grave eating of russet apples by the philosophers, and a solemn disappearance into the night. Alcott was perpetually putting apples of gold in pictures of silver ; for such was the rich ore of his thought, coined by the deep melody of his voice. Thoreau charmed us with the secrets won from his interviews with Pan in the Walden Woods ; while Emerson sought to bind the wide-flying embroidery of discourse into a web of clear good sense.”¹

The “impossible summer-houses” mentioned by Curtis were not built quite so early, but grew up in the years 1846–1847, both at the Wayside and at Emerson’s garden edge. In another connection Curtis says : —

“The Orphic Alcott designed and with his own hands erected a summer-house which gracefully adorns the smooth grass-plot at the side of Emerson’s house. Unhappily, this edifice promises no long duration, not being technically based and pointed. It is natural that Alcott should build graceful summer-houses ; there are

¹ The real names have here been substituted for the fanciful ones which Curtis originally gave ; and I have omitted, as he would have done had he reprinted this, some playful satire on Mr. Alcott, which gave pain to his family, — for no man was less willing to inflict pain on any but the wicked.

even people who declare that he has covered the pleasant but somewhat misty lawns of ethical speculation with a thousand such edifices, which need only to be a little more 'technically based and pointed' to be quite perfect. At present they whisper, the wind blows clean through them, and no figures of flesh and blood are ever seen there, but only pallid phantoms with large, calm eyes, eating uncooked grain out of baskets."

Emerson's summer-house was more durable than perhaps this satirical shepherd imagined; for it stood a picturesque temple, and then a beautiful ruin, for some fifteen years after Alcott and Thoreau built it, as a memento of Emerson during his absence in Europe in 1847. Thoreau's account of it in his letters to Emerson is quite as sarcastic as Curtis's; but Thoreau was a geometrical person, whose buildings were substantial and framed by the Carpenter's Theorem. He wrote thus:—

"Alcott has heard that I laughed, and so set the people laughing, at his arbor, though I never laughed louder than when I was on the ridgepole. But now I have not laughed for a long time, it is so serious. He is very grave to look at. But, not knowing all this, I strove innocently enough, the other day, to engage his attention to my mathematics. 'Did you ever study geometry, the relation of straight lines to curves, the transition from the finite to the infinite? Fine things

about it in Newton and Leibnitz.' But he would hear none of it, — men of taste preferred the natural curve. Ah, he is a crooked stick himself.

"Pray show him this if you meet him anywhere in London, for I cannot make him hear much plainer words here. He forgets that I am neither old nor young, nor anything in particular, and behaves as if I had still some of the animal heat in me. As for the building, I feel a little oppressed when I come near it. It has no great disposition to be beautiful; it is certainly a wonderful structure, on the whole, and the fame of the architect will endure as long as it shall stand."

Four years after this pleasing structure was built, James Freeman Clarke, with his friend W. H. Channing, spent some days at Emerson's house, working with him on the memoir of Margaret Fuller; and he enters in his diary for Sept. 5, 1851: "Spent the forenoon in Mr. Alcott's summer-house, reading Margaret Fuller's Italian letters." This was a good use for such a temple of friendship; and it survived in art, through drawings of it made long afterward by Miss Sarah Clarke and by May Alcott.¹ Speaking of

¹ May Alcott was a child of Concord, and took more delight in the town and its opportunities than her elder sisters or her mother. She studied art before the Orchard House was bought, and continued her studies, with little progress at first, for many years; and she not only became

Concord in general as he saw it in 1845-1846, Curtis said:—

“ It is one of the quiet country towns whose charm is incredible to all but those who by loving it have found it worthy of love. Here upon the homely *steppe* of Concord is a strain of Persia. The Wayside House lies at the foot of a wooded hill, with a porch in front and a central peak and a piazza at each end. When the philosopher Alcott came into possession, it was a miserable little house of two peaked gables. But the genius which recreated itself in devising summer-houses soon smoothed the new residence into comeliness. It was an old house, but Alcott's tasteful fingers touched it with picturesque grace. He built terraces and arbors and pavilions, of boughs and rough stems of trees, revealing, inadequately perhaps, the hanging gardens of delight that adorn his Orphic imagination.”

The Alcott family remained here until late in 1848, and then removed to Boston for some years, where Mr. Alcott carried on the conversations already mentioned. During the three years that

an excellent artist herself, but inspired the love of art in two Concord sculptors, French and Elwell, who have since distinguished themselves. She published in 1869 a volume of “Concord Sketches,” made by her from 1860 onward, among which is a fine drawing of the Alcott summer-house in Emerson's garden, and of the Hawthorne house, as rebuilt in 1861. In England she devoted herself greatly to Turner, and made some of the best copies of his pictures that have been seen in America.

they occupied the Wayside, Mr. Alcott's gardening enthusiasm had full play, and he there collected those briefs and illustrations of horticulture, from Cowley, Evelyn, and other English authors, which adorn his essays and were often used in his conversations. Emerson, in his journal for 1847, says: "Gardening, Alcott thought to-day, was a good refuge for reformers, abolitionists, etc., that they might acquire that realism which we so approve in merchants and in Napoleon. Yes; gardening and architecture would certainly be affirmative wholly, and so remedy this 'unlimited contradicting' and chiding, which is 'a flat affair.'" His Orchard House, a dozen years later, gave him more ample facilities for gardening and fruit-growing, but not for tree-planting and terrace-building. At that time, however, he had the taste and energy of his daughter May to aid him in planning and decorating the home in which Louisa wrote the best of her works. At the age of sixty he was still in this idyllic vein: and its results were well described by Mrs. Child, an early friend of Mrs. Alcott, who visited the Orchard House in 1876. She says (what was equally true of the Wayside estate): —

"The home of the Alcotts took my fancy greatly. When they bought the place the house was so very old that it was thrown into the bargain, with the supposition

that it was fit for nothing but firewood. But Mr. Alcott has an architectural taste more intelligible than his Orphic Sayings. He let every old rafter and beam stay in its place, changed old ovens and ash-holes into Saxon arched alcoves, and added a washwoman's old shanty to the rear. The result is a house full of queer nooks and corners, with all manner of juttings in and out. It seems as if the spirit of some old architect had brought it from the Middle Ages and dropped it down in Concord; preserving much better resemblance to the place whence it was brought than does the Virgin Mary's house which the angels carried from Bethlehem to Loretto. The capable Alcott daughters painted and papered the interior themselves. And gradually the artist-daughter filled up all the nooks and corners with panels on which she had painted birds and flowers; and over the open fireplaces she painted mottoes in ancient English characters. Owls blink at you, and faces peep from the most unexpected places. The whole leaves a general impression of harmony, of a mediæval sort, though different parts of the house seem to have stopped in a dance that became confused because some of the party did not keep time. The walls are covered with choice engravings, and paintings by the artist-daughter."

It was for the chimney-piece of the study in the Orchard House that Ellery Channing wrote the fine epigram which May Alcott painted upon it:

"The hills are reared, the valleys scooped, in vain,
If Learning's altars vanish from the plain."

Wherever Alcott dwelt, the altars of learning stood, and were served with daily worship; for he was the most studious of mankind, as well as the most radical and reformatory.

The connection of Bronson Alcott with the movement of Garrison for emancipating the American slaves was a very early, constant, and sincere one. In the summer of 1830 Garrison was imprisoned at Baltimore for attacking the domestic slave-trade in the person of a Northern sea-captain who had carried a cargo of slaves from Baltimore to New Orleans. Released by the generosity of Arthur Tappan, a Massachusetts merchant trading in New York, Garrison came to Boston, and, before establishing his "Liberator," gave three lectures in that city on the sin of slavery, and the need for immediate emancipation. The clergy turned their backs on him, and he could get no Boston church in which to lecture, although the churches were often used at that time for philanthropic meetings. He then proposed to speak on the Common, where, a century and a half before, Quaker women had been hanged for revisiting Boston against the wish of the clergy. But a Boston "infidel," Abner Kneeland (already mentioned), gave the young Abolitionist the use of Julien Hall, where he was then holding meetings, and the first lecture was given there. Rev. S. J. May, Mrs. Alcott's brother,

who was visiting his newly married sister in Boston, says in his "Recollections":—

"I had not then seen this resolute young man [Garrison]. I had heard of his imprisonment, was eager to see and hear him, and went to Julien Hall on the appointed evening. My brother-in-law, A. Bronson Alcott, and my cousin, Samuel A. Sewall, accompanied me. Truer men could not easily have been found. . . . Never before was I so affected by the speech of man. When he had ceased speaking, I said, 'This is a providential man; we ought to know him, we ought to help him. Come, let us go and give him our hands.' Mr. Sewall and Mr. Alcott went up with me, and we introduced each other. . . . Mr. Alcott invited him to his house. He went, and we sat with him until twelve that night, listening to his discourse. That night my soul was baptized in his spirit, and ever since I have been a disciple and fellow-laborer of William Lloyd Garrison."

Bronson Alcott was not so ready as the amiable and devoted May to become any man's disciple,—he was born rather to lead than to follow,—but he continued firm in the faith that Garrison then announced. When in 1835 Garrison was mobbed in Boston, Alcott, who had been making his first visit to Emerson in his new house at Concord, hastened to the Leverett Street jail, where Garrison was confined, to console his friend and offer him aid. A few months earlier, I find this pas-

sage in the diary, concerning Gurley, the chief opponent of Garrison at that time:—

“*Aug.* 16, 1835. I find Rev. Mr. Gurley, Secretary of the Colonization Society, with us. He is staying a few days in Boston, and I have had some conversation with him on the absorbing topic of Slavery. He is plausible, affects candor and liberality, but is, I fear, too much wedded to the specific objects of colonization to look deeply and dispassionately into this great question. He is timid; he lacks a philosophical spirit. I have little confidence in the views which he may take of this subject. In the present excitement men are wanted of large and generous spirit, of apprehensive intellect, men of the highest order of powers. Principles must be sought, — principles universal in their application, touching and lifting up every detail in practice.”

As the conflict against slavery went on, other causes arose, which appealed more immediately to Mr. Alcott's sense of duty and capacity than did the daily struggle with our great national sin in politics, and the same was true of Emerson; but neither of the two friends hesitated to declare his opinions, and stand by them when occasion arose. Thus Emerson denounced the slaying of Lovejoy, the martyr of Alton, upon whose death Wendell Phillips made his maiden speech in Boston, in rebuke of Northern apologists for Southern slave-masters; and Alcott about the same time

bore his quiet testimony by taking a colored girl into his declining school, to which that act gave the finishing stroke. In spite of its noble minority, Boston was then and long remained one of the bulwarks of the slave-power. This was seen in 1850-1851, when Webster and his political friends, joining with their old opponents, the Democrats, passed the Fugitive Slave Bill, and had it twice executed in Boston, in 1851 and 1854. On the last of these disgraceful occasions, the country people of Massachusetts, under the lead of a Boston "Vigilance Committee," came very near storming the court-house, where Burns, the arrested fugitive, was held in confinement, and rescuing him, as the slave Shadrach was saved a few years earlier. The assault failed for lack of concert in those who were to attack; but among the foremost to follow Wentworth Higginson was Bronson Alcott. Colonel Higginson, who has the best right to know what took place that night, has thus described Mr. Alcott's share in the affair:

"He attended all meetings of the Vigilance Committee under whatever form, and he it was who came to Worcester, where I was then living, to notify me of the arrest of Anthony Burns, and to ask my prompt presence in Boston. On the evening of the unsuccessful attempt on the Court House, — an attempt skilfully planned, which would undoubtedly have succeeded had

Faneuil Hall possessed, as now, a private entrance to the speaker's platform, — the first result of the premeditated alarm was to bring to Court Square from Faneuil Hall a useless crowd of hangers-on from the thronged audience, while the antislavery men who were nearest the platform were left far behind, so that the leaders posted in Court Square found themselves without a support. The door, however, was burst through; two men got inside, but were overpowered and forced out by the marshal's posse, in the midst of a confusion in which a deputy named Batchelder was killed, — the first blood of the Civil War. In a few minutes both crowd and posse had withdrawn, — the former to a sheltering stairway, covering the doorway with their pistols; the latter to the foot of the steps, leaving the steps, doorway, and hall empty and brightly lighted. There was a moment's entire pause, in the midst of which there came calmly forth from the crowd, like the Gray Champion in Hawthorne's story, the venerable form of Mr. Alcott. Pausing ere he ascended the steps, he said calmly to one of the ejected assailants, 'Why are we not within?' 'Because,' was the rather impatient answer, 'these people will not stand by us!' Mr. Alcott said not a word, but placidly walked up the steps, — he and his familiar cane. He paused again at the top; a revolver sounded from within, but hit nobody; and finding himself unsupported, he retreated, as his predecessors had done, but without hastening his step. It seemed to at least one person present that, under the circumstances, neither Plato nor Pythagoras would have behaved more

coolly; and all minor criticisms on our modern sage appear a little trivial when one thinks of him as he appeared that night."

His courage, physical and moral, was indeed of the highest; and in the John Brown excitement of 1859 he offered to go down to Virginia, and, if possible, open communication with Brown in prison. He was always ready, as Thoreau was, to shelter and aid the hunted slave, to whom Concord was a safe place of refuge. No part of the shame of supporting or tolerating our national sin and curse rested on him; nor did he fail to utter his prayer and say his frank word in favor of European freedom, while so many Americans were praising Louis Napoleon, and the other despots of the Old World. I find in his diary at Concord, in 1849, while on a visit to Thoreau and Emerson, these prophetic words:—

"*September* 14. In the evening I read the New York 'Tribune.' Alas for poor Hungary! But the Demon has sway some quarter-century longer, — then to lay himself fairly, and give Liberty full scope and prevailing."

This might now pass for an accomplished prediction; for between 1849 and 1874 ("some quarter-century longer") the scope of liberty was enormously extended. Within ten years John Brown helped

to free Kansas, and struck his blow in Virginia; Garibaldi freed Sicily in 1859-1860; France cast out Napoleon in 1870, and by 1874 had become a firmly set republic; Lincoln emancipated our slaves in 1863, Alexander his Russian serfs in 1861; and Pedro of Brazil freed his slaves in 1871. At the close of the foreseen quarter-century, America was free and united, Italy united and free, Hungary had acquired important liberties, and even Spain was in name a republic. It took a serene and hopeful glance to foresee all this in 1849,—almost the darkest year of our struggle with slavery in this virgin country.

During Emerson's visit to Europe in the winter of 1847-1848, Thoreau and Ellery Channing, remaining in Concord, saw much of Mr. Alcott, who was then closing the period of his second residence in that town; and Thoreau wrote thus to Emerson (January and February, 1848) concerning him and his occupations:—

“Mr. Alcott seems to be reading well this winter: Plato, Montaigne, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Sir Thomas Browne, etc., etc. ‘I believe I have read them all now, or nearly all,’—those English authors. He is rallying for another foray with his pen, in his latter years, not discouraged by the past, into that crowd of unexpressed ideas of his, that undisciplined Parthian army, which, as soon as a Roman soldier

would face, retreats on all hands, occasionally firing backwards; easily routed, not easily subdued, hovering on the skirts of society. . . . I have good talks with him. His respect for Carlyle has been steadily increasing for some time. He has read him with new sympathy and appreciation. I see Channing often. He also goes often to Alcott's, and confesses that he has made a discovery in him, and gives vent to his admiration or his confusion in characteristic exaggeration; but between this extreme and that you may get a fair report, and draw an inference if you can. . . . I had a good talk with Alcott this afternoon. He is certainly the youngest man of his age we have seen,—just on the threshold of life. When I looked at his gray hairs, his conversation sounded pathetic; but I looked again, and they reminded me of the gray dawn. He is getting better acquainted with Channing, though he says that if they were to live in the same house, they would soon sit with their backs to each other."

It was in this year particularly that Alcott made a shrewd observation on his friend Channing, which Emerson records in his journal: "Ellery Channing had a keen appetite for society, with extreme repulsion, so that it came to a kind of commerce of cats, — love and hate, embraces and fighting." Of Thoreau's first book, while yet in manuscript, Alcott had written in his diary (March 16, 1847), two years before its publication: —

“ This evening I pass with Thoreau at his hermitage on Walden, and he reads me some passages from his manuscript volume, entitled ‘ A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers.’ The book is purely American, fragrant with the life of New England woods and streams, and could have been written nowhere else. Especially am I touched by his sufficiency and soundness, his aboriginal vigor, — as if a man had once more come into Nature who knew what Nature meant him to do with her ; Virgil, and White of Selborne, and Izaak Walton, and Yankee settler, all in one. I came home at midnight through the snowy wood-paths, and slept with the pleasing dream that presently the press would give me two books to be proud of, — Emerson’s Poems and Thoreau’s Week.”

Mr. Alcott still cherished his hope of printing “ Psyche,” — that mystical volume which was yet in manuscript at his death in 1888. Forty years before he had prepared, perhaps for this work, a kind of shorter catechism for the initiated, to which the replies, no doubt, were to appear in the book.¹

¹ This singular paper came to me in 1851, before I had ever seen Mr. Alcott, — passing through the hands of several ladies, from hers for whom the questions were written, and who is supposed to have been Miss Hosmer of Concord, a resident in the farmhouse adjacent to the Hosmer Cottage, where the Alcotts had spent the first three years of their Concord life. It is the same house mentioned in the diary, Sept. 12, 1849, in which Mr. Alcott spent a few days at that time. Near by was the Indian feasting-place known as “ Clamshell,” from the abundance of Indian débris there.

They were written for the special Sarah, whose interest in the problems of life had prompted the seer to test her depth of thought by these searching inquiries: —

THE SPHINX'S QUESTIONS, WITH PSYCHE'S
ANSWERS.

Thorough a thousand voices
Spoke the universal dame:
"Who telleth one of my meanings,
Is master of all I am."

EMERSON.

CONCORD, May, 1848.

"Spirit displays through Nature's frame,
Flame letters of the First Man's name."

*Seven Questions put to Sarah by the Sphinx, and
Inviting Answers.*

I.

1. Do you like the *named* best?

2. Or the unnamed? and what of what you feel *is*, have you held, by sound, before your mind, that you might see whether you knew it, or any part of it, or could feel or like any part?

3. Or have you lived, feeling the *unnamed* and liking IT best unnamed; living in the silence which seemed more beautiful to you, and holding more of the Best than words or sounds could hold before you?

4. Do you speak best by means of sounds or sights, or by silences?

5. Or do sounds and sights help out feelings and

thoughts from the silence into a clearer and lovelier meaning?

6. Do you converse best in words and looks, or liveliest and best in silence and alone?

7. Have you found in the countenance of any one, or in the speech, tone, or manner of another, an image of what you loved best; and so had a looking-glass of the Best, in which you could see the best you loved before you, and yourself in it?

[This Sphinx stands by the wayside, puts the questions to every by-passer, and devours him instantly if he give not an answer. Œdipus answered them all, and knew when others answered well. Œdipus was good to help out the answer, for he was wiser than the Sphinx even, and had compassion on the stupidity of mortals. Œdipus was considerate, too, and put his questions through the Sphinx in the order in which they were easiest answered. Œdipus loves Sarah,—all the Sarahs,—and waits for them to go by the Sphinx, and inspires them with courage; and they find wisdom to answer.]

II.

1. Which is the older, the memory, the thing remembered, or the person remembering?

2. Can you remember when you did not remember?

3. Which is predecessor, Time or the memory?

4. Are moments born of the memory, or memory of the moments?

5. How old is your Person?

6. What measures age, — the memory of times or of eternities?

7. Whether is Flesh predecessor or successor of Spirit?

[The Sphinx's cycles are always. She waits, then, after putting her seven questions, for the answers of the flying wayfarer. Her riddles are easiest to youth, which, living in the Present, the new-born moment, is itself a contemporary of the Spirit, and partaker of its mysteries.]

III.

1. Are the veils hidings or findings?

2. What discovers us?

3. Is the doubling in all things around *singles*, or the singling around *doubles*?

5. Is the single content and complemented without the double?

6. Which feeds the curiosity and draws us on to discovery?

7. Which is the pursuer, which the pursued?

[Atalanta, the Ideal, our quest in forms through the senses by which essences cannot be discovered. Appearances are myths or veils, — symbols, as we say, of realities unseen. Eye, ear, taste, touch, do tickle us with earnest of delight; new, manifold. The invitations; eager our pursuit of the coy maiden, ever at the fingers' ends, — yet chaste she fleeth as we follow, flinging her girdle at our feet behind her, — the veiled enchantress still, as ever.]

IV.

1. Is Nature one, or many, or both?
2. What in us discovers the One?
3. Does the One pass into the many, or the many into the One?
4. What do we name the experience of the One?
5. What sentiment and what perception attends this experience of the One?
6. Are experiences of the One limited by the narrowness of our minds; or does this experience expand and find illimitableness in the One?
7. Can we lose sight and hold of the many, and become inhabitants of the One; or does the many divide our perceptions, and hold us tenants of several mansions at the same time?

[All that doth pass away
Is but a symbol;
The insufficient here
Grows to existence:
The indescribable,
Here it is done;
The ever feminine
Draweth us on!]

V.

1. What perishes and what endures in natures?
2. What sense or power delivers the perishable from the imperishable?
3. Are births and deaths transitions or final states of existence?

4. What cradles Being?
5. Are lives one or many?
6. Do creatures take on lives, or put forth lives?
7. What lives have *you* experienced?

[Whatever that be of which we think, called by what name soever, thus it may declare itself, —

In the tides of life,
In the storm of action,
I am tossed up and down,
I drift hither and thither;
Birth and grave,
An eternal sea,
A changeful weaving,
A glowing life;

Thus I work at the whispering loom of Time,
And weave the living clothing of the Deity.]

VI.

1. Are questions and answers one and the same, —
how one, and how not one?
2. Which is ancestor and parent — Mind or Heart
— one of the other?
3. Know you a power of yourself, sinless and never
consenting to the wrong in will or deed — or deem you
that power above, and not of yourself? Which?
4. Name the Transcendent.
5. Do you find and measure yourself, or its shadow?
6. Fly you easier, or walk, or creep, or swim, or sit?
7. What is your Person-Emblem?

[“Reclusè hermits oftentimes do know
More of Heaven’s glory than a worldling can;

Is man is of the World, the Heart of man
Is an emblem of God's great rock
Of existence, and man needs no further rock."

VII.

1. Is Nature question or answer?
2. Whose answer is that?
3. Is it possible for us to perceive and declare the
poor truth?
4. To whom alone is lying impossible?
5. Has the Sphinx drawn the deepest answer from
you?
6. Whence the danger of being deceived by the
Sphinx?
7. Why and how questions (to the present) with
some lines more, or the rest of forty-line questions?

[The Sphinx says through Nature's mouth,

To man movement is the answer.

Life's motions

All times that

Is motions

World's

God's motions

Motion]

Emerson's "Sphinx," in its final form, varying from that which he had printed in the "Fool," had appeared in 1847, and suggested the title and theme of this paper. The other verses, except the first couplet and the last eight lines, which are Abbott's own, are taken from Goethe's "Faust," and from an illustration poem which he often

most. The paper itself was copied for me, at the age of twenty, by the lady whose record of a conversation on Rationalism has been given in a former chapter. We discussed ourselves now and then in examining each other on these profound themes,—hardly approaching them how deep and subtle this Pythagorean questionary is. It will now recall the aroma of that time when the words of Greek (there are two perfectly rendered) were received as oracles; when the divine philosophy of Plato truly sounded in our ears,—

"Moral as a Apollo's line"

Such rare experiences can never be repeated; yet I would fain indicate the charm of

"These years of youthful hope,

When every breeze was Zephyr, every morning May;

When as we bravely climbed the slope

Of Life's steep mountain, we gained a wider scope

At every step, and could with joy survey

The track beneath us and the upward way;

Brilliant to sight, round about the breast of Love

Fragrant and warm from Heaven's own temple dew;

Reckless as when glad uncles and aunts and uncles

Depend on what the future has to show!"

This second 1841 of *Alcestis* in Concord may fill and be record with a diary of the summer and early autumn of 1843, receding briefly, as it does, the free intercourse of *Alcestis* with the chosen

companions, along the streams and amidst the pleasant fields of Concord: —

“*July 7-8, 1849.* To Concord this afternoon, to pass Sunday with Emerson. The next day see Thoreau a little while; to Walden afterwards (with Emerson), discussing Genesis and the rest.

“The forest bees flew round to sip
Sweet honey from the sovereign lip.

“*Sunday Evening.* I am at Hillside (now the Wayside), and sell my grass crop there to Hosmer the carpenter for the house repairs. Monday morning I leave at ten, and bring home ‘Hermes Trismegistus;’ also some manuscripts left with Emerson some time since, and intended for my ‘Transcripts’ now. This has been a refreshing time, and leaves in the memory now a sense of an eternity outlived with my friend, and ensouled by us mutually.

“*July 11.* The most expressive faces owe their interest to their inwardness chiefly, and to the depth and distance of their perspective, — as a palace seen at the end of an avenue, or at some unexpected turn in the grounds. But I have seen faces frequently without distance or vistas; like houses without shrubbery, and thrust into the street. The soul asks a background also, as well as courts winding approaches. A human being is a creature too significant, even in his meanness, to be approached with rudeness, and is not to be seen sidewise, or run against by the roadside. Nor would I make any man my friend and companion who had not

some indefinite prospects in his countenance and commanded whole landscapes of meaning, — who was not merely mundane, but firmamental and Olympian also. We must sit aloft in the clouds oftentimes, and serenely, if we would oversee Life, and guide her restless steeds up to heaven. Even sight and sunshine are themselves moats and mist, till clarified and dispelled by the risen beams of great thoughts and surprises.¹

“Mind omnipresent is,
It all around us lies,
And happeneth unto us
In love and ecstasy,
In wonder and surprise.

“*August 2.* I meet Emerson and Lowell in the afternoon at the Town and Country Club rooms in West Street, and discuss English poetry with profit and pleasure; also Hungary and the present condition of the world.

“*Sunday, August 5.* All day discussing the endless infinite themes [with Emerson] in the study, and

¹ This entry of July 11, though written in Boston, where Mr. Alcott was then living, was plainly suggested by his walks in Concord through the avenues and woodpaths of Emerson's familiar grounds, and by the sight of Guido's Aurora, hanging in Emerson's house, — a present from the Carlyles at his marriage. In 1849 the Alcotts still owned the Wayside estate of thirty acres, mostly in wood; but there was a fine little field of grass, at the foot of which ran a sweet brook, where Mr. Alcott had planted willows, and made a bathing-place for his girls. He sold the estate to Hawthorne in 1851.

while walking ; the late revelations leading all the rest, — Oken, Goethe, Swedenborg, subordinate and sunk in these theories of the Creation, — so they seemed and were. [Here follows in the diary a slip of paper in Emerson's handwriting pasted upon the page, as follows : —

“ A subtle chain of countless rings,
The next unto the farthest brings ;
The eye reads omens where it goes,
And speaks all languages the rose ;
And striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form.”]

“ *Monday, August 6.* At Hillside to-day. Dine with Thoreau, and return at 3 P. M. to Temple Place and my Tablets again.

“ *Saturday, September 1.* Go to Concord, see Thoreau awhile, and sleep at Emerson's. Sunday I pass the forenoon with Thoreau ; we walk by the ‘ Cottage,’ and discourse reclining near the Indian Meadows by the riverside. Afternoon with Emerson ; we walk to Walden and bathe. Emerson reads me the introductory pages to his book of ‘ Representative Men,’ now nearly ready for the press ; and we discuss Plato, Goethe, Swedenborg, and some others of his representatives of the race. Of Swedenborg, especially, there was much said, and of the Goethe and Oken morphologies ; with my late experiences and their fruits, as intimated in the ‘ Tablets,’ but not easily reported here.

“ *Concord, September 12.* Afternoon, walk with Emerson along the riverside by the meadows behind

Hillside, and to the Virginia fields.¹ Pass the evening with him, discussing Boston and the winter's entertainments, returning at nine to my rooms at Mrs. Hosmer's. Emerson gave me a copy of his newly reprinted 'Nature : Addresses and Lectures,' being his fourth book ; a fifth, the ' Representative Men,' is also ready for the press now.

" *September 14.* Sleep is sweet here in this chamber ; the air salubrious without, and with Emerson and Thoreau for walking companions, or idling along the roadsides and river, in fields, on hilltops, through woodpaths by the Cliffs or Walden, — it is all that invalids such as I most need. All this and these I have, and enough daily.

" *Sunday, September 23.* Afternoon to Emerson's, and we walk to Walden, discussing (going and returning) the Demonic in Nature and mankind, as the rain pours.

" *Friday, 28th.* This morning repair a little the thatching and interior of Emerson's summer-house, standing gracefully on the lawn, and embowered now by evergreens set there by Thoreau and myself (in 1847-1848). The front gable is seen from the road, and attracts the notice of passers-by, as it did in that autumn while we were building it, — they wondering and prattling about what it could be for."

¹ This was a favorite walk of Emerson's, from the Old Manse down the river to Peter's Field and Cæsar's Woods, then across the meadows and hills to the Virginia Road, near Bedford, where Thoreau was born, and thence back to Emerson's house.

The education of his children occupied Mr. Alcott very much from 1844, and while he lived at Concord in this idyllic way,—very poor, but full of high thoughts and cheerful hopes. These his daughter Louisa inherited; and while living at Hillside she wrote, for Ellen Emerson and other children younger than herself, the fairy stories — “Flower Fables,” which her father published in 1854. She was but sixteen when these were written, and this was her earliest work. Nor did she succeed in writing anything that gave her fame, until the family returned to Concord for the third time in 1857. After that she wrote her first novel “Moods,” and her “Hospital Sketches,” which, as published in the “Boston Commonwealth,” where her father was then printing his rural essays, ran like wildfire through the country, and were copied in many newspapers. The life and fancies of these dramatic children made a good part of the Concord idyl which this chapter has sketched.

NOTE TO PAGE 425. — Mr. Emerson, in relating the anecdote of Saint Francis, seems to have confounded him with another saint, Bernard of Clairvaux, whose biographer relates that he made a visit to Lausanne in the first half of the twelfth century. “He was returning to Geneva, his heart saddened by what he had just seen of the habits of the clergy and people of Savoy. The journey occupied all one day, as he rode on his beast, followed by his companions. At nightfall the saint heard his disciples conversing about this Lake Lemán, which had much delighted their eyes. Saint Bernard asked them, ‘Where, then, is this fine lake?’ beside which he had been riding all day; and his disciples marvelled greatly at his question.” See the “Dictionnaire Historique, Géographique, et Statistique du Canton de Vaud,” p. 544. Lausanne, 1867. It is possible, of course, that a like legend may be extant concerning Saint Francis of Assisi and one of the Italian lakes.

CHAPTER X.

LIFE IN BOSTON.—TOWN AND COUNTRY CLUBS.

SOON after the Alcotts took up their abode in Boston, in 1848, where Mrs. Alcott was engaged as a friendly visitor among the poor, and thus was able to contribute largely to the support of the family, Mr. Alcott began to hold those conversations at his rooms in West Street of which some report has already been given. Chiefly at his suggestion, early in 1849, a club was organized with a remarkable list of members, and a name chosen by Emerson, which was afterward perpetuated by Colonel Higginson in a more permanent organization at Newport. As finally constituted in July, 1849, there were a hundred and four members.¹ The Town and Country Club

¹ These are the names of the earlier members invited by Mr. Alcott to meet for organization: R. Waldo Emerson, William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Parker, William Henry Channing, A. Bronson Alcott, Wendell Phillips, Thomas T. Stone, F. Henry Hedge, Samuel G. Howe, J. Freeman Clarke, Edmund Quincy, John W. Browne, J. Elliot Cabot, T. Starr King, J. Russell Lowell, Samuel G.

room was at 15 Tremont Row; and there were to be annual, quarterly, monthly, and weekly meetings, — the latter for conversation only, while the monthly meetings were to commence at 9.30 A. M. for an essay, followed by a discussion at 3 P. M. This seemed to imply a day's work. But the meetings were planned with a view to long intermediate periods of relaxation; so that, in the middle of the day, the Boston men might go to their offices, and the country clergymen do the shopping for their households. In a letter of J. R. Lowell to the now forgotten "Broadway Journal," he gave an amusing account of the early days of this enterprise. "The Club," he says, "is a singular agglomeration. All the persons whom other folks think crazy, and who return the compliment, belong to it. It is as if all the eccentric particles which had refused to revolve in

Ward, John L. Weiss, Edwin P. Whipple, T. Wentworth Higginson, Parker Pillsbury, Henry D. Thoreau, Henry I. Bowditch, Henry C. Wright, John S. Dwight, Francis Jackson, W. Ellery Channing, William B. Greene, Caleb Stetson, George P. Bradford, Adin Ballou, Jones Very, William F. Channing, Elhzur Wright, Stephen S. Foster, Charles C. Shackford, Emanuel Scherb, E. P. Clarke, Samuel D. Robbins, Joshua Melroy, J. T. Fisher, Oliver Johnson, O. B. Frothingham, C. K. Whipple, Samuel Johnson, James N. Buffum, William H. Knapp, Samuel May, Jr., Otis Clapp, J. M. Spear, Charles Spear, W. R. Alger, Edward Bangs, R. F. Walcott, A. D. Mayo

the regular routine of the world's orbit had come together to make a planet of their own." He recalls that Mr. Alcott, "whose orbit never, even by chance, intersects the plane of the modern earth," proposed to call it the "Olympian Club," to which Lowell responded that if we must cultivate the antique it might be well, as the Club hoped to aid in crushing some monsters, to call it the "Club of Hercules." Nobody had a better right to name this Club than Mr. Alcott, for he had brought it together, by the following letter of invitation: —

12 WEST STREET, BOSTON, Feb. 20, 1849.

DEAR SIR, — I send you herewith the names of a select company of gentlemen, esteemed as deserving of better acquaintance, and disposed for closer fellowship of Thought and Endeavor, who are hereby invited to assemble at No. 12 West Street, on Tuesday, the 20th of March next, to discuss the advantages of organizing a Club or College for the study and diffusion of the Ideas and Tendencies proper to the nineteenth century; and to concert measures, if deemed desirable, for promoting the ends of good fellowship. The company will meet at 10 A. M. Your presence is respectfully claimed by

Yours truly,

A. BRONSON ALCOTT.

Very early in the management of the Club arose the question whether women should be admitted to membership; and in this connection Colonel

Higginson has published a remarkable letter written to him by Emerson, after Higginson had proposed for membership Miss Elizabeth Peabody and Mrs. Mary Lowell Putnam, whose names never came to a vote, for the reason explained in Emerson's letter (dated Concord, May 16, 1849): —

I was in town yesterday, and Mr. Alcott showed me the list of subscribers to the Town and Country Club, and I read at or near the end of the list the names of two ladies, written down, as he told me, by your own hand. On the instant I took a pen and scratched or blotted out the names. Such is the naked fact. Whether the suggestion obeyed was supernal or infernal, I say not. But I have to say that I looked upon the circumstance of the names of two ladies standing there upon our roll as quite fatal to the existence of our cherished Club. I had stated to the Club the other day that "men" was used designedly and distinctively in the first draft, and the Club by vote decided that it should stand so. I had moreover, yesterday, just come from a conference with some gentlemen representing the views of an important section of the members, who, alarmed by the pugnacious attitudes into which the Club was betrayed the other day, were preparing to withdraw, and whom I assured that all those who had long been projecting their literary Club would not be deprived of their object, and something else thrust on them; when to my surprise I found this inscription of names of ladies. I erased them at once, that no man

might mistake our design. I really wish you would join with us in securing what we really want, a legitimate Club Room; and very many of us will, I doubt not, heartily join with you in obtaining what is legitimate also, but not what we now seek, a Social Union of literature, science, etc., for the sexes. But we claim the priority of time in our project, and do not wish to be hindered of it, when it is now ripened and being realized. I am quite sure it is the wish of the great majority of persons who have acted in it hitherto, to establish a Club-house; and you must let us do it, and you must heartily join and help us do it.

Yours with great regard,

R. W. EMERSON.

This letter settled the question of admitting women to Mr. Alcott's Club,—but not precisely as Alcott himself would have settled it. Colonel Higginson describes in a humorous way the rise and fall of this Club, which was shipwrecked on the question of economies at a time when clubs were not, as now, easily formed and sure to continue. At the meeting of January, 1850, it was voted to assess each member two dollars in addition to the original five dollars which secured membership after election:—

“At the March meeting, it was later announced, a committee would report upon the pecuniary condition and prospects of the Club, and recommend a plan for

reorganization ; and then at this meeting a committee of five was appointed, consisting of Dr. H. I. Bowditch, Dr. G. B. Loring, A. B. Cleveland, C. K. Whipple, and Otis Clapp, to collect the additional assessment, if possible, before April 4, 1850. The committee, issuing a circular, says sadly : ‘ In pursuance of this appointment we call upon you to fulfil your pecuniary obligations to the Club, that its debts may be paid, and your fellow-members relieved from an unequal burden.’ Here the melancholy series of documents ends, and the ‘rest is silence.’ ”

The prosperous successor to this premature effort to bring together in Boston the men of thought and letters was the monthly gathering called the “Saturday Club,” or the “Atlantic Club,” or by whatever name, — of which Emerson was the actual centre, as he had been of the Town and Country Club, although others had been more active in its affairs. The other Concord authors were rather shy of these great dinners at the Parker House ; and Alcott, though occasionally present, objected to the meats and wines. Thoreau declined entirely, and wrote this comment, I suppose before 1860 : —

“ As for the Parker House, I went there once, when the Club was away ; but I found it hard to see through the cigar smoke ; and men were deposited about in chairs over the marble floor, as thick as legs of bacon

in a smoke-house. It was all smoke, and no salt, Attic or other. The only room in Boston which I visit with alacrity is the Gentlemen's Waiting-Room at the Fitchburg Depot, where I wait for the cars, sometimes for two hours, to get out of town. It is a paradise to the Parker House; for no smoking is allowed, and there is far more retirement. A large and respectable club of us hire it (Town and Country Club), and I am pretty sure to find some one there whose face is set the same way as my own."

A letter of Henry James, senior, to Emerson after dining at the Saturday Club in Boston, about 1862, on a rare occasion, when Hawthorne and Ellery Channing were both present, though written years after the period of which we are now speaking, so well preserves certain peculiar traits of the Concord authors, as observed by this humorous Swedenborgian and most frank of rhetoricians, that it may here be cited:—

"I cannot forbear to say a word I want to say about Hawthorne and Ellery Channing. Hawthorne is n't a handsome man, nor an engaging one, personally. He has the look all the time, to one who does n't know him, of a rogue who suddenly finds himself in a company of detectives. But in spite of his rusticity, I felt a sympathy for him amounting to anguish, and could n't take my eyes off him all the dinner, nor my rapt attention, as that indecisive little —— found, I am afraid, to

his cost, for I hardly heard a word of what he kept on saying to me, and felt at one time very much like sending down to Parker to have him removed from the room as maliciously putting his little artificial person between me and a profitable object of study. Yet I feel now no ill-will to ——, and could recommend any one (but myself) to go and hear him preach. Hawthorne, however, seemed to me to possess human substance, and not to have dissipated it all away, as that debauched X. Y. and the good, inoffensive, comforting Longfellow. He seemed much nearer the human being than any one at that end of the table, — much nearer. J. F. and yourself kept up the balance at the other end; but that end was a desert, with him for its only oasis. It was so pathetic to see him, contented, sprawling, Concord owl that he was and always has been, brought blindfold into the brilliant daylight, and expected to wink and be lively like any little dapper Tommy Titmouse or Jenny Wren. How he buried his eyes in his plate, and ate with a voracity that no person should dare to ask him a question! My heart broke for him as that attenuated X. Y. kept putting forth his long antennæ toward him, stroking his face, and trying whether his eyes were shut.

“The idea I got was, and it was very powerfully impressed on me, that we are all monstrously corrupt, hopelessly bereft of human consciousness, and that it is the intention of the Divine Providence to overrun us and obliterate us in a new Gothic and Vandalic invasion, of which this Concord specimen is a first fruit.

It was heavenly to see him persist in ignoring X. Y. and shutting his eyes against his spectral smiles; eating his dinner and doing absolutely nothing but that, and then going home to his Concord den to fall on his knees and ask his Heavenly Father why it was that an owl could n't remain an owl, and not be forced into the diversions of a canary. I have no doubt that all the tenderest angels saw to his case that night, and poured oil into his wounds more soothing than gentlemen ever know.

“ Ellery Channing, too, seemed so human and good, — sweet as sunshine, and fragrant as pine woods. He is more sophisticated than the other, of course, but still he was kin; and I felt the world richer by two *men* who had not yet lost themselves in mere members of society. This is what I suspect, — that we are fast getting so fearful one to another, we members of society, that we shall ere long begin to kill one another in self-defence, and give place in that way to a more voracious state of things. The old world is breaking up on all hands, — the glimpse of the everlasting granite I caught in Hawthorne shows me that there is stock enough for fifty better. Let the old impostor go, bag and baggage, for a very real and substantial one is aching to come in, in which the churl shall not be exalted to a place of dignity, in which innocence shall never be tarnished nor trafficked in, in which every man's freedom shall be respected down to its feeblest filament as the radiant altar of God. To the angels, says Swedenborg, Death means Resurrection to life; by that necessary rule

of inversion which keeps them separate from us and us from them, and so prevents our being mutual nuisances."

It must have been a happy coincidence that could bring two such retired, avoiding persons as Hawthorne and Ellery Channing into this company of town wits, and it never can have occurred but this once. Alcott now and then dined with this Club, of which he may be called one of the founders; for it grew out of dinners given by Horatio Woodman in the old Albion in 1854, at which Alcott was often present.¹

¹ Horatio Woodman was a New Hampshire man, practising law in Boston, an early friend of the Littlehale family, to which Mrs. Cheney belonged, and thus introduced, as early as 1850, to Mr. Alcott. He had no particular sympathy with the Transcendentalists, except as they became famous, but a certain love for literature and literary men; he was also an epicure, knowing how to provide good dinners, and at which Boston tavern his friends ought to dine. His early dinners at the Albion, which was a small tavern of the English sort, at the corner of Tremont and Beacon Streets, will be mentioned later in connection with Thomas Cholmondeley's first visit to America. Woodman organized not only the Saturday Club in its earlier and simpler form, but also that sylvan picnic of literary and scientific men in the New York forests (August, 1858) which Emerson has described in his poem "The Adirondacks." His after career was unfortunate, even disgraceful; for he was found to have made way with trust property in his hands, by which his friends suffered great loss. He disappeared about 1870, and has never since been heard from.

Mrs. Alcott, who was the mainstay of the family during these years in Boston, found her "Town and Country Club" among the poor and wretched, and in this work of hers her husband aided her. They were always friends of the poor, and to them might be applied that noble compliment which Dryden, in one of his dedications, bestows on the Duke of Ormond: "The history of Peru assures us that their Incas, above all their titles, esteemed that the highest which called them Lovers of the Poor,—a name more glorious than the *Felix*, *Pius*, and *Augustus* of the Roman Emperors; which were epithets of flattery, deserved by few of them, and not running in a blood like the perpetual gentleness and inherent goodness of the Ormond family."¹ Many anecdotes might be given to show this "inherent goodness" of the Alcott family; but one or two, related by Louisa as occurring during their life in Concord, may here be cited: —

"Once we carried our breakfast to a starving family; once lent our whole dinner to a neighbor suddenly taken unprepared by distinguished guests. Another time, one snowy Saturday night, when our wood was very

¹ Dedication of Dryden's *Fables*, 1699. All these prefaces of Dryden are worth reading, and none of them more than this.

low, a poor child came to beg a little, as the baby was sick and the father on a spree with all his wages. My mother hesitated at first, as we also had a baby. Very cold weather was upon us, and a Sunday to be got through before more wood could be had. My father said, 'Give half our stock, and trust in Providence; the weather will moderate, or wood will come.' Mother laughed, and answered in her cheery way, 'Well, their need is greater than ours; and if our half gives out, we can go to bed and tell stories.' So a generous half went to the poor neighbor, and a little later in the evening, while the storm still raged, and we were about to cover our fire to keep it, a knock came, and a farmer who usually supplied us appeared, saying anxiously, 'I started for Boston with a load of wood, but it drifts so I want to go home. Would n't you like me to drop the wood here? It would accommodate me, and you need n't hurry about paying for it.' 'Yes,' said father; and as the man went off, he turned to mother with a look that much impressed us children with his gifts as a seer. 'Did n't I tell you wood would come if the weather did not moderate?'"

An earlier anecdote, which has been several times incorrectly related, was extracted by me from Mr. Alcott's memory thirty years after it occurred,—for it happened, not in Concord, nor in the Transcendental days, but soon after his return to Boston from Philadelphia, in 1834,—and I here

relate it as the authentic version of what has already become a myth:—

“The master of the Temple School was breakfasting at his boarding-house in Boston, when the bell rang, and a stranger sent word that he wished to see Mr. Alcott, who went into the next room, and there found a man who said to him, ‘Mr. Alcott, you do not know me, and will be surprised to learn why I have called on you. I am a man in business here, and I am very much in want of five dollars this morning, which I will repay as soon as I can. Will you lend me that sum?’ Mr. Alcott, thinking here was an opportunity to test his favorite theory of human nature, — for, like the Dean’s wife, his

“Life, all honor, observed with awe,
Which cross experience could not mar,
The fiction of the Christian law
That all men honorable are,” —

took out his pocket-book instantly. ‘I have no five-dollar bill,’ said he; ‘but here are ten dollars, — take this.’ The man looked surprised, but took the money and went his way. His creditor did not even take the trouble to ask his name, and for this final proof of credulity was incessantly rallied by his friends, who for months would ask him when he expected to be repaid. More than six months afterward, at the same hour of the day, the same man appeared again, saying, ‘Mr. Alcott, I have n’t forgotten that you lent me ten dollars when I only wanted five; I have called to repay

you, and I wish that you would add the interest.' This the creditor declined to do, but received his principal and suffered his debtor to go away again without asking his name. Some weeks afterward, happening to tell the story in a Boston counting-house, and describing the appearance of his visitor, he learned that it was a noted confidence-man, or Jeremy Diddler, who in this instance had found the simple trust of the philosopher too much for even his professional villany to withstand."

It was during his residence in Boston that the first good portrait was made of Alcott, in crayons, by Mrs. Richard Hildreth, wife of the historian, and aunt of the famous portrait-painter, George Fuller. It was drawn just before my first acquaintance with the Alcotts, in 1852, and was afterward changed by the artist, who had not been entirely satisfied with her earlier work. Except the medallion made by Cheney a year later, it is the best head of Alcott in his Boston days, and is thus mentioned by Mrs. Alcott in her journal of Jan. 25, 1857:—

"Mr. Alcott brings the portrait by Mrs. Hildreth done in 1851. She has lately retouched it, which I regret. She has made a beautiful picture of it, but it is less Mr. Alcott, our dear husband and father, than a rapt seer and prophet. One feels like taking a seat, after the fashion of Baruch, and in the roll of a book writing what the speaking, lifelike saint and seer is

about to utter. A tinge of the incomprehensible lies softly around in a fold of atmosphere, as if she had worked with the down from an angel's wing, rather than with a crayon, — as if the moonlight had cast a shadow on the lights of her picture, and divinity had touched with a soft shade the dark portion of the figure. Mrs. Hildreth has altered the costume from a dress-coat to a mantle, draped about the shoulders. This, too, I do not like. The chaste simplicity of Mr. Alcott's dress is more in character and keeping with the severe simplicity and rectitude of his life. Louisa admirably describes her father's appearance as she met him at the cars: 'His dress was neat and poor. He looked cold and thin as an icicle, but serene as God.' After such a testimony from such a daughter, he can afford to dress shabbily. The drapery of lawn thrown about him is less becoming than a seedy coat, once black, but with time become reverently gray. I thank Mrs. Hildreth for the effort to satisfy us. Had she done less, I think her success would have been greater. Her ideal must be gratified at the expense of mere resemblance. She thought of the man, and gave form and feature to the mind." Mr. Alcott adds: "This picture is the only one yet taken by a true artist. Mrs. Hildreth proposed taking this as a work of love, and exhausted her skill upon it. It cannot, perhaps, be called a likeness to the senses. It was not designed to be, probably, but drawn to the Ideal, as she pictured the possible subject. It is prized by those interested."

The portrait thus described by Mrs. Alcott, though idealized, as she says, does yet recall vividly the serene philosopher as I first saw him at his Boston home in Pinckney Street, in the early autumn of 1852. He sat in his library surrounded by books,—not then a very large collection, and containing prominently among them what Ellery Channing mischievously called his “*Encyclopédie de Moi-même, en cents volumes*,”—a collection of his diaries and correspondence well bound, and now of more value than all the other works in his more ample library, for which, in 1881 and 1882, was built the library wing of his last residence in Concord. He was surrounded by his children on this particular evening; and I specially remember Miss Louisa Alcott, then in her twentieth year, and not yet known as an author,—although even at that time she had written many stories, some of which were afterward published, and had planned some dramatic works; for she was looking forward, like so many women of her period, to a career on the stage. Her earnest face, large dark eyes, and expression of profound interest in other things than those which usually occupy the thoughts of young ladies, made a deep impression on me, scarcely effaced or affected by all the recollections of her in after years, when I sometimes acted with her in private

theatricals, sometimes assisted at gayer assemblies in Concord or Boston, sometimes was her publisher, her critic, her biographer, or her companion at the family fireside, during the five-and-twenty years that I saw the Alcott family, or some member of it, almost daily. I was in 1852 a student at Harvard College, and had known Mr. Alcott through Miss Littlehale and other friends for a year or two, but had never seen him. He represented to me the more mystical parts of the Transcendental philosophy; while Theodore Parker, whom I already knew, represented the learned and practical part, and Emerson, with whose books I had long been familiar, stood for the poetic element. It was not unusual for Mr. Alcott's friends to view him at that time with a certain humorous fancy, so much had he been laughed at in the newspapers; but it was in no such spirit that I approached him. His poverty and his want of practical success did not lessen his worth in my estimation even then; nor did I ever have occasion, in later years, to join in that vulgar disparagement of poetic and ideal natures into which it is so easy to fall with respect to our contemporaries, but which we are slow to forgive when centuries have removed the temporary distinction between the brilliant success of Alcibiades and the tragic failure of Socrates. It will make very

little difference, even to men of the twentieth century, whether this Connecticut schoolmaster, this rejected citizen of Boston, acquired in his own time either wealth or glory or material power; for the busy merchants and the great centurions of New England will then be mostly forgotten, and have as little to show for their practical results as this visionary of Concord.

The first residence of the Alcotts in Boston was in Dedham Street, convenient to the missionary work among the poor in which Mrs. Alcott was engaged; but before I knew them they had removed to Pinckney Street, after a short residence in High Street. In this house, No. 20 Pinckney Street, the two elder daughters, Anna and Louisa, opened a school; but soon after, in 1853, Anna was engaged as a teacher in one of the State institutions at Syracuse, where her uncle, Mr. May, had then been living for some years as parish minister. Mr. Alcott in the mean time began at the West, in the winter of 1853-1854, that long series of conversation-tours which ended only in the last year of his life. His first excursion of this kind was pecuniarily unsuccessful, as is related in the journal of Louisa for February, 1854, printed in Mrs. Cheney's pathetic biography. He returned late at night with a single dollar in his pocket, saying in explanation of his failure:

“Many promises were not kept, and travelling is costly; but I have opened the way, and another year shall do better.”¹

During my college days Mr. Alcott frequently visited at Cambridge the small circle of Transcendentalists then residing at Harvard University,—holding conversations now and then, sometimes at our frugal dinner-table and sometimes in the room of some student.

It was during Mr. Alcott’s residence in Boston that he became intimate with Mr. Marston Wat-

¹ The subjects for these Western conversations were thus stated in the circular which was issued before Mr. Alcott left Boston:—

Conversations. — A. Bronson Alcott proposes to discourse, in some of the Western cities, during the current season and coming winter, on **THE LEADING REPRESENTATIVE MINDS OF NEW ENGLAND**; with suitable Retrospects and Prospects of its History and Tendencies. The course to consist of six evening conversations, to be held at such times and places as shall be designated by card or otherwise hereafter.

Conversation I. Daniel Webster and his class.

“ II. Horace Greeley and his class.

“ III. William Lloyd Garrison and his class.

“ IV. S. Margaret Fuller and her class.

“ V. Theodore Parker and his class.

“ VI. Horatio Greenough and his class.

“ VII. R. Waldo Emerson and his class.

Terms for the course, \$3.00.

Boston, Oct. 24, 1853.

These were the conversations which had been so successful in Boston two or three years earlier; and twenty-five years later they would have been successful at the West also.

son, the Evelyn of New England, who transformed a bare pasture-land in his native town of Plymouth into a beautiful park and garden, which became one of the favorite resorts of the Concord Transcendentalists,—Mr. Watson himself being one of the earliest of that school, and a friend and pupil of Jones Very while at Harvard College. Beginning in 1852, Mr. Watson and others of like opinions in Plymouth instituted a series of Sunday services at Leyden Hall, in which addresses were made or sermons preached by Alcott, Emerson, the two Channings (Ellery and William H.), Thoreau, Wendell Phillips, Garrison, Edmund Quincy, Charles Remond, Wentworth Higginson, Jones Very, Samuel Johnson, Thomas F. Stone, Peter Lesley the geologist, C. C. Shackford, Stephen Foster and his wife Abby, John T. Sargent, Emanuel Scherb, W. H. Hurlburt, Adin Ballou, D. A. Wasson, and N. H. Whiting of Marshfield. These names will indicate not only what a variety of discourse the Plymouth reformers enjoyed, but also the extent of the circle to which Mr. Alcott belonged forty years ago. In answer to a request for a visit at Hillside, standing in its beautiful grove and garden, Mr. Alcott made his first appearance there in September, 1853.

In the following year he paid a visit of some

weeks at Plymouth, of which I find this record in the diary:—

“ *Sept. 11, 1854.* Make some family arrangements and leave at 5 P. M. for Plymouth. Sleep at Watson’s.

“ *Tuesday, 12th.* We walk about Hillside, to which Watson has added an adjoining estate of fifty acres, including an orchard which he designs for me if I will build a house in the grove skirting it on the northeast, an eligible site for a cottage. We stroll there and build castles. — *Evening.* I show him my books and manuscripts.

“ *Thursday, 17th.* I read Watson my “ Emerson’s Summer-House ” diary for 1847, Concord ; and Watson engages me to build one for him the coming autumn, 1855, near his house, embowered in the grove, with front gables looking south and east ; a lookout with winding stairs ; all of rustic wood.

“ *Monday, 18th, Afternoon.* We ride to Billington Sea with Mrs. Watson and the children. This beautiful sheet of water was discovered on the 8th of January, 1621, from the top of a high tree, by honest Francis Billington, who supposed it to be the great western ocean ; and a week afterwards, with the master’s mate of the ship, actually made a tour of exploration of its shores. These circumstances have given it the name of Billington Sea. — *Evening.* I read ‘ Tablets ’ and MSS. with Watson and wife.

“ *Tuesday, 19th.* ‘ Tablets ’ uninterruptedly. — *Af-*

ternoon. We ride with Mrs. Watson and the children around Billington Sea ; Watson and I hunting curved timbers, knots, and sylvan ornaments for his summer-house, of which we find a good supply in the woods. In the evening I read a MS. criticism on Thoreau's ' Week ' from my journal of 1847, and other passages of the Concord Hillside diary."

To Mrs. Alcott: —

PLYMOUTH, Sept. 21, 1854.

MY DEAR, — We have been looking for you here at Hillside since Tuesday, and if you don't come before, I shall expect you on Saturday, certainly, to spend Sunday and as much longer as you can spare from the remnant still staying at 20 Pinckney Street ; which, with Master Joseph,¹ might stay safely there, one would think, and happily, until Monday, when you could return, if you felt you must, to their eyes and protection again. So come down by the early train, and we can have Saturday and all of Sunday here for this charming place, hospitable people, and all that both have at heart for us and ours. I very much wish you to see the place and them, and discuss orchards, cottage comforts, and whatever advantages this Old Colony has in store for the family. Watson himself is worth the journey ; and then his kindly wife (so charming to our children's memories) and Madame Watson, from whom the noble son seems to have taken not a few of his virtues, the

¹ Now Rev. Joseph May, Mrs. Alcott's nephew, then a student at Cambridge.

children and charms of this little paradise, — to say nothing of the pleasure you will give us all, — will well reward your coming ; and we shall be here together, — a happiness that has rarely occurred to us away from home ; not since our jaunt to Wolcott in '30, I believe. 'The Orchard' is a beauty, and you may have any quantity of apples there, — any speculation there, over golden russets, Tolman sweetings, or Greenings, you please ; build cottages or castles in the grove, and the like endlessly, with such basis for them as the Phillipses', Frothinghams', and Emersons', perhaps Thomas Davis's, good will and Watson's nurseries shall warrant. A dream of this sort is not the idlest we have dreamed, separately or together, since the Brooklyn or Brookline days. Old people, they say, are all the more given to put faith in some of their early dreams, — if not in cottage or orchard for themselves, for their children none the less, and the more believingly. By the way, I am anxious not a little about Anna,¹ and shall write after I have seen and consulted with you about her ; meanwhile I hope you have advised strongly insisting on her return with Louisa, and pretty soon. That climate is unfriendly to such as she is, and we must have her near us, as I think you agree with me. New England for our sort, — and Plymouth or Concord, unless all the powers agree on Boston and keep us there for safe and sure ends. We shall see presently, and so settle for more than a twelvemonth or so.

¹ The eldest child, then at Syracuse, N. Y.

As for me, I am having never busier or more satisfactory days; have already accomplished more than the half part of my work here, and put "Year 1849" into shapely, readable form for reference hereafter. Yesterday we picked apples, Watson and I, thirty bushels or more. I read or walk with the children before breakfast, and have the day uninterruptedly to myself in my pleasant chamber, looking out upon Duke Marston's dominions,—all unfenced, the cultivated and the wild, as is their owner's princely heart. I should be happy to give something of like quality, had I it to bestow, on the most faithful and deserving of wives and women. So till Saturday.

Yours ever,

A. B. ALCOTT.

"*Friday, 22d.* Copy diary for 1849; also ride with Watson to the cider-mill, and hunt curves for the summer-house by the wayside, going and coming; finding many spoils for our work when we shall need them. We read again in the evening, from MSS. chiefly.

"*Saturday, 23d.* Diary; also a walk about Hillside and the Orchard, castle building. — *Evening.* We ride to the village, expecting my wife. She does not come, but writes me, and I get the letter at the post-office and return. J. Spooner, postmaster's son, is at Hillside, and I read him the criticism on Thoreau from my MSS., and other things. Spooner is a hearty admirer of Thoreau, and visits him soon.

[Here an interval of two weeks.]

“ *Oct. 7, 1854.* Thoreau arrives to supper, and we discuss the Genesis till bedtime, Thoreau sleeping with me in my bedchamber.¹

“ *Sunday, 8th.* We walk about Hillside and ride around Billington Sea after dinner.—*Evening.* Thoreau

¹ Thoreau had made his first visit to Plymouth in the winter of 1851-1852, for the purpose of speaking at Leyden Hall. These Sunday services were much enjoyed by the Concord speakers, among whom, besides those named above, was Rev. Daniel Foster, then pastor of an independent church in Concord, and afterward active in protecting Kansas from the establishment of slavery. He is the person mentioned in this note from Thoreau to Watson (Feb. 17, 1852): “I have not yet seen Mr. Channing, though I believe he is in town, — having decided to come to Plymouth myself, — but I will let him know that he is expected. Mr. Foster wishes me to say that he accepts your invitation, and that he would like to come Sunday after next; also that he would like to know before next Sunday whether you will expect him. I will take the Saturday afternoon train. I shall be glad to get a winter view of Plymouth Harbor, and to see where your garden lies under snow.” He had been invited to give a lecture in January, 1853, but replied (Dec. 31, 1852): “I would be glad to visit Plymouth again, but at present I have nothing to read which is not severely heathenish, or at least secular, which the dictionary defines as ‘relating to affairs of the present world; not holy, though not necessarily unholy; nor have I any leisure to prepare it. My writing at present is profane, yet in a good sense, and as it were sacredly, I may say; for finding the air of the temple too close, I sat outside. Don’t think that I say this to get off. No, no! It will not do to read such things to hungry ears. ‘If they ask for bread, will you give them a stone?’ When I have something of the right kind, depend upon it I will let you know.”

reads an admirable paper on 'Moonlight' to a small circle at Leyden Hall.

" *Monday, 9th.* I help Thoreau survey Hillside.

" *Tuesday, 10th.* Again survey with Thoreau and Watson. — *Evening.* Company at Hillside, and a conversation on Health; Thoreau and some of the ladies — Mrs. Watson, the Misses Kendall, etc. — taking part.

" *Wednesday, 11th.* Carry chain in surveying the Orchard with Thoreau, also about Hillside walks. The Orchard contains eight and one third acres.

" *Thursday, 12th.* Read Records at the Court House, and find some facts for my collection. — *Afternoon.* Walk about the Orchard and the woods behind it.

" *Friday, 13th.* I leave at nine for Boston, and arrive at Pinckney Street to dine with my family.

" *Saturday, 14th, 2 P.M.* Dine at the Albion with Emerson, Lowell, Whipple, Dwight, Hayne (of South Carolina), and Woodman; and we arrange to meet there fortnightly hereafter for conversation.

" *Sunday, 15th.* I read with surprise and admiration Henry Sutton's new book just published in London by J. Chapman, entitled 'Quinquenergia, or Proposals for a New Theology,' 12mo, pp. 322. This is a truly original and mystic book, the work of a profound religious genius, combining the remarkable sense of William Law with the subtlety of Behmen and the piety of Pascal. The author is yet a young man, and one of the few Englishmen whom I should go far to see. His book is too full of piety and courage to be popular, and yet will find faithful reading and favor with the solid

and solitary few here and in the old country. His speculations have more in common with my own than any which have come to my knowledge lately, and interest me deeply.

“ *Monday, 16th.* Read Sutton, and find the poems, though unequal, abounding in fine lines; and all are sweet and thoughtful. — *Afternoon.* Lowell comes and looks at my books and manuscripts. He takes Henry More’s poem of the ‘*Psychozoa*’ from my library to compare with his. He is editing now for publication the poems of Marvell and Donne, and will add Henry More to the series.

“ *Tuesday, 17th.* Many family errands to-day, and preparations for leaving for Brooklyn, N. Y., to give some conversations there.”

It was in this year (1854) that we all made the acquaintance of Thomas Cholmondeley, the Oxford scholar and New Zealand sheep-farmer, who came to America not so much to see the country as to make the acquaintance of a few persons, — Alcott, Emerson, Thoreau, Theodore Parker, Ellery Channing, and Horace Greeley. He landed at New York, and almost immediately came to Concord, having letters to Emerson, and took a room with the Thoreau family, for the sake of cultivating his taste for Henry Thoreau, with whom he formed a close friendship. He used to dine with us at the Albion in those early gatherings that grew into the

Saturday Club, and in which Alcott felt more at ease than he did afterward at the more formal and brilliant meetings of the Club at the Parker House.¹

Mr. Alcott visited me at Cambridge, Nov. 20, 1854, and met some of our friends at dinner. In the conversation he said things that may be quoted :

“He complained of our naturalists that they begin with matter, whereas they should begin with spirit;

¹ I visited Concord Nov. 21, 1854, and walked with Emerson through the Walden woods in the afternoon. He then told me of an Englishman who had lately come to Concord,—an Oriel man, a Puseyite, who had been in Australia and written a book, “Ultima Thule,” on his experiences there. “He is the son of a Shropshire squire,” said Emerson, “and is travelling during his nonage. He is better acquainted with things than most travelling Englishmen; they are a singularly verdant race. The Englishman who stays at home and attends to what he knows is one of the wisest of mankind; but their travellers are most unobservant and self-complacent. I asked this man if he saw any difference between our autumn foliage and that of England. He said no; but all men who have eyes notice it at once: ours is tulips and carnations compared with theirs. So, too, he told me he went to hear a Mr. Parker in Boston; he thought him able, but was shocked at some of his doctrines. Cholmondeley began then talking to me about original sin, and such things; but I said, ‘I see you are speaking of something which had a meaning once, but is now grown obsolete. Those words formerly stood for something, and the world got good from them, but not now.’” Just then we met the man himself strolling back from Walden, and Mr. Emerson invited him to dinner the next Saturday.

thus, in the ‘Vestiges,’ the author supposes mankind developed as a final product from inorganic matter. This is wrong. The Deity does not work in this way, building up man out of matter ; but man is rather a link between God and matter. Matter is the refuse of Spirit, — the *residuum* not taken up and made pure spirit. It is like a swarm of bees. They are conical, like the arrangement of things and man. All the bees depend on the queen bee ; so all matter depends on man. This which we are now engaged in is an instance of what I mean by the use of matter by spirit. Out of the food before us, each selects what is needful for him, and rejects the rest. So Spirit, selecting what is for its use, rejects the rest, and to *it* the refuse is matter. The naturalists are in doubt whether Deity made stone, or stone made Deity. Agassiz is a good observer, but he has a *system of spines*, from which he cannot disconnect himself. The world to him is strung on a set of spines. It is better to say boldly that we are not formed from matter, but that we ourselves form it, — that the eye creates what it looks upon, the desires what they act upon, etc. ‘This is nearer the truth,’ said I. But Mr. Alcott seemed to imply that it was almost the exact truth. Turning to B., he said, ‘We are waiting for you theologians to set forth this view, but you are slow to do it.’ B. replied that the majority of men who listen to sermons would not understand a statement of this kind. ‘Shall we preach only to the few, while the many go uncared for?’ ‘Can you ever preach to many at once?’ said Mr. Alcott (not in these

words), 'and would you preach to the Irishman on the railroad, with his brain built of potatoes and such things? No, you must pass by Patrick, and speak to the men who are before him; they will hand it down, until by and by Patrick will get it.' We all demurred a little to this. I said the greatest minds often found themselves equally appreciated by the high and the low. B. spoke of Christ's apostles, who were 'Irishmen' in Mr. Alcott's signification. 'Not at all,' said he; 'Christ made them what they were, to be sure, but he had good timber to make them of. They were not really common men. It is not the distinctions of society that I speak of, but those in the nature of man. How few there are who really hear a man! Those who do so must dine on him; you must eat him up to get the good of him. Christ's disciples did so; that is the meaning of transubstantiation, — nothing else. So nowadays men feed on Mr. Parker. He is strong meat to them; and they go away only to come back with an appetite for more. "That was good," they say, "we must have some more of that." It is not so much so with Emerson. He is a finer food. A man who eats meat gets hungry sooner than I do. He has a ravenous appetite.'"

Before the end of this afternoon at Cambridge, Mr. Alcott spoke of his journals. Even in 1854 there were, he said, "some thirty or forty volumes in which he had put down his life and thoughts, sketches of persons, and the like, beginning with

'22 or '23, *when we first began to be somebody*, as we thought, — and continuing till we shall leave this world." What to do with them he did not know. "There is no library or institution where they may be kept, and they are not for publication as they are. Nor are they to be left to the family, — some things are, but these are not." "We are not happy with the pen," said Mr. Alcott. A few days after this (Saturday, November 25), I dined with Mr. Alcott in Pinckney Street, and my journal of that day describes his study: —

"It was a small back room on the first floor, with a wood-fire on the hearth. On each side the chimney were bookcases, and on the right side, in front of the bookcase, the writing-table. The ornaments were, on the mantel, a little bust of Christ, and over it an old engraving of Raphael's 'School of Athens.' On the left wall hung Mrs. Hildreth's crayon of Mr. Alcott, and on the opposite side a small engraved head of Emerson. Over one of the bookcases was a bust of Pestalozzi. At dinner I met Mrs. Alcott and Anna, the oldest daughter (a young lady of twenty-three), and Louisa, the second daughter, who is twenty-two. The dinner was without meat, but nice and inviting. Miss Anna talked of the actor Forrest, whom she had seen the night before, and was warm in his praise; Louisa joined in. We talked about the 'Dial,' and he gave me the names of most of the contributors, — showing me, also, what he calls his 'Tablets,' — extracts from

his diaries arranged in a certain order, under the signs of the zodiac. They consist of apothegms, short essays, and the like, and are designed for publication. I saw also some letters from Emerson about 'Psyche,' the book which Mr. Alcott once wished to publish, but was finally dissuaded by Emerson, who criticised the style, saying, 'The prophet should speak a clear discourse, straight home to the conscience, but your page is a series of touches. You play with the thought, — never strip off your coat, and dig and strain and drive into the root and heart of the matter. See what a style yours is to balk and disappoint expectation; to use a coarse word, 'tis all stir and no go.' Of particular words, Emerson wrote at some length: '*Gabardine* we have had before; say *frock*. "Lunch" is vulgar, and reminds one of the Bite Tavern. Don't patronize! I hate patronage. If there's a good thing, say it out, — there are so few in the world, we can't wait a minute.' Of Emerson's method of writing, Mr. Alcott said: 'He puts down in his commonplace book from day to day whatever he thinks worthy; and in the Fall, when he is preparing his lectures, or when he is making up a book, he goes over this commonplace book, notices what topic has been uppermost in his thought, and arranges his fragments with reference to that. This accounts for the want of formal method in his works. They are crystallizations. A theology infused into you, as in Emerson's books, is better than one directly taught. The best men, when they teach theology, get harsh and narrow; the indirect way is the best.' "

I find this record in my journal for December, 1854, the first date being December 2: —

“I went to the Albion this afternoon, expecting to meet Mr. Alcott, who was not there; but I found Mr. Emerson, J. S. Dwight, and Thomas Cholmondeley, the Englishman, who is tall, mustached, with a thin, high voice, — which he did not use very much on this occasion, — and rather languishing manners. Mr. Alcott came later, and the conversation turned on literary men and things. Mr. Emerson spoke of an English book, ‘Christie Johnstone,’ written by Charles Reade, which he praised highly; said it ought to be printed in Boston, and urged Mr. Dwight to do it as a speculation, for it was better than ‘Jane Eyre.’ He also spoke of a Concord poet, B. W. Ball, who had visited him some years before. He was then fresh from Dartmouth College, and had been writing poetry in the Ariosto style; he had a barrel of such manuscripts, said Emerson. Afterward he published a volume which had good things in it; he is now an editor in New York. George Bancroft being mentioned, Emerson spoke of his recent speech in New York in praise of Calvinism, — his ‘Triune God,’ ‘Arrogant Arius,’ ‘Devout Athanasius,’ and the like. Bancroft, he said, is not a religious man. His Trinitarianism was assumed out of deference to New York sentiment, which is Presbyterian and Episcopalian. ‘In conversation,’ said Mr. Emerson, ‘Bancroft will take any side and defend it skilfully, — he is a soldier of fortune.’ He thought his speech at the

Phi Beta dinner in Cambridge when Lord Ashburton was present, was one of his best efforts. Quincy and Story had spoken, but rather stiffly and coldly. Bancroft warmed up the audience. He spoke of Bancroft's ostracism in Boston on account of his politics as an instance of Boston proscription. Soon after Mr. Alcott came in, the conversation turned on old age, and one of the company said he could not understand why youth must be left behind. Mr. Emerson said much the same, adding, 'This man here,' turning to Mr. Alcott, 'used to tell us what experience is every day disproving, that "the beauty turned inward."' To which Mr. Alcott made some gentle reply. 'I have the trick,' said Mr. Emerson, 'of believing every man whom I talk with as old as myself; so I warn you, young men.' The point in question was Charles Sumner's age.

"Leaving the Albion, I walked with Mr. Alcott and Cholmondeley to Monroe's bookstore on Washington Street, to get Ellery Channing's poems for the Englishman. We talked with Monroe himself, who said that three fourths of all American poetry is published at the author's expense. Cholmondeley inquired about the success of Miss Yonge's 'Heir of Redclyffe;' which Monroe thought had not been very popular here, where antislavery novels were so much in fashion. Cholmondeley said, 'I think Miss Sewell's novels are — what shall I say? — tuft-hunting.' Leaving Mr. Alcott, I told Cholmondeley of his early life, his adventures in Virginia, etc. He wondered that a pedler should have educated himself so well, and have acquired such grace-

ful manners, — ‘They are the manners of a very great peer.’”

Tuesday, Dec. 12, 1854, Mr. Alcott again called on me in the morning; and when to a knock at my door in Holworthy I said, “Come in,” in walked the serene Alcott with his placid smile. He had come to invite my classmate, Edwin Morton of Plymouth,¹ and me to sup with him that night; but I had an engagement, and could not go. My journal then proceeds: —

“Cholmondeley and Woodman were to be there, he said, and he hoped I would ‘break bread’ with him. I was sorry that I could not. We went over to Morton’s room in Massachusetts Hall, and found him writing his paper on Thoreau (afterwards printed in the Harvard

¹ Edwin Morton, born at Plymouth, Dec. 24, 1832, was a descendant of the Pilgrims, and the son of a gentleman of the same name, who had contributed to the experiment at Brook Farm. He had fitted for college in part by reading Greek and Latin with Marston Watson at Hillside, and was one of the few musicians, Transcendentalists, and Abolitionists then in Harvard College, where he graduated in 1855. He afterward spent four years in the family of Gerrit Smith at Peterboro, N. Y., as tutor and private secretary; and thus became implicated in the Kansas and Virginia plans of John Brown, who unfolded the plot of his Virginia campaign to a few of us in Mr. Smith’s house at Peterboro, Feb. 22, 1858. For many years Mr. Morton has resided in Switzerland, where he has printed a small volume of poems.

Magazine for January, 1855). This led us to talk of Thoreau, and Mr. Alcott spoke of him happily: 'He is a fine beast. The brutes ought to choose him for their king, so near does he live to Nature, and understand her so well. He is older than civilization, and loves Homer because he is of Homer's time. In the parlor he is out of place, — as a lion would be, — he is outside of humanity. Men he knows little about. What a naturalist he is! Agassiz and the rest might learn of him. It is a pity that he and Emerson live in the same age. Both are original; but they borrow from each other, being so near each other. Thoreau has seen the day from all points, — and the night. He knows all about them. Whatever he does is from fate, — he is as much under its control as the beasts are. The other day Thoreau and Horace Greeley went to the opera together.' He invited both Morton and me to the Albion dinner on Saturday, the 16th, where Emerson is to be present. At that time he described Thoreau again much as he did in Cambridge. Richard Dana, who was present, had not read Thoreau, but said he supposed him a man of abstractions altogether. Mr. Alcott quoted what Dr. T. W. Harris said of him (the Harvard entomologist): 'If Emerson had not spoiled him, he would have made a good naturalist.'"

Mr. Alcott left Boston in the later summer of 1855, and made his home for two years, with his wife and two youngest daughters, in the house of Mrs. Alcott's kinsman, Mr. Willis, at Walpole, N. H.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ALCOTT FAMILY IN LITERATURE. — WALPOLE AND CONCORD.

WHEN the Alcotts removed to the valley of the Connecticut, at Walpole, in 1855, Bronson Alcott was fifty-six, Louisa twenty-three, and May fifteen. As a family, they had seen much happiness, but very little worldly prosperity. Beginning with a small property, on either side, they had early incurred debt, chiefly to promote those plans for the good of others which both the father and mother had heartily formed and resolutely carried forward; and from these burdens they could never free themselves, until literature came in as a bread-winner, and the brilliant daughter, after years of unrequited toil with the pen, at last found herself famous, and able to restore and build up the fortunes of the household. But this was no accident, nor yet the single achievement of Louisa Alcott, as some seem disposed to regard it. Her success had for its background the whole generous past of her family. Even literally this was so;

for it was only as the historian of the household, the chronicler of their romantic and pathetic story, that she could permanently touch the hearts of the public. Her short and bitter experience in the army hospitals, early in the Civil War, when related by her, did indeed command attention far and wide; but these "Hospital Sketches" were only her letters to the family, during those few weeks, revised long after, when she had recovered from the long illness into which her hospital life had thrown her. Nor did she again reach any marked success in her chosen vocation until she turned into cordial fiction the family life and the girlish sentiments and adventures of the four sisters, whom the removal to Walpole for the first time really separated. In this unavoidable separation occurred the first great misfortune of the household,—the long, fatal illness of Elizabeth, the third daughter, ending with her death in Concord in 1858.

And this calamity also was in consequence of one of those generous acts which the Alcotts performed as constantly and inevitably as most persons perform acts of self-interest. There was scarlet fever in a poor family near where they were living in Walpole. Mrs. Alcott went there to see that proper care was taken of the neglected children; thus the disease found entrance to her

own home, and the dear daughter was stricken down. She lingered in the later stages of this disease for many months, and it was to give her a better chance of recovery that her father and mother removed from the banks of the Connecticut to the neighborhood of Boston, in 1857, and finally established themselves in Concord, where she died.¹

The residence in Walpole had been but a temporary thing, after the dream of a cottage at Plymouth in Marston Watson's orchard was given up, and before the arrangement was made for the purchase, by Mrs. Alcott and some of her husband's friends, of the small estate on which the Orchard House stands, in the eastern part of Concord. It was an old New England farmhouse of the better sort, and had stood there under the pine-covered ridge for nearly two centuries, when the Alcotts became the owners of it. Adjoining it on the east was Hawthorne's "Wayside,"

¹ The removal to Concord was in October, 1857; but the Orchard House, though purchased a few weeks earlier, was not ready for occupation until July, 1858, and the family lived during the winter and spring in a house near the Town Hall, where Elizabeth died. Louisa, in her journal, says of the burial: "On Monday Dr. Huntington read the Chapel service, and we sang her favorite hymn. Mr. Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Sanborn, and John Pratt carried her out of the old home to the new one at Sleepy Hollow, chosen by herself."

which ten years before had been Alcott's "Hillside;" and from April to July the Alcott family again occupied the Wayside House.¹ Elizabeth had died in the preceding March. I had then been at the head of a small school in Concord for about three years; and among my pupils in the drawing-class were two of the Alcott sisters for a short time, while all three took part in charades, theatricals, and other amusements, at my school-rooms or at the village homes of Concord. May Alcott now began to show that love of art which afterward gave direction to her whole life; and in these classes and rehearsals Anna Alcott made the acquaintance of John Pratt, son of one of the Brook Farmers of an earlier period, whom she married at the Orchard House in May, 1860. Louisa,

¹ The journal of Louisa Alcott, from which Mrs. Cheney has made copious extracts in her biography, gives the dates and incidents of this period. Hawthorne was still in Europe, and did not return until the summer of 1860. In April, 1858, Louisa writes: "Came to occupy one wing of Hawthorne's house (once ours) while the new one was being repaired. Father, mother, and I kept house together; May being in Boston, Anna at Pratt Farm, and, for the first time, Lizzie absent. . . . *July, 1858.* Went into the new house and began to settle. Father is happy; mother glad to be at rest; Anna is in bliss with her gentle John; and May busy over her pictures. I have plans simmering, but must sweep and dust, and wash my dish-pans awhile longer till I see my way."

whose taste for the drama had not been gratified, and who continued writing short stories for the weekly newspapers, where they appeared without her name, now began to make her mark as a writer; and it was during this final residence of the family in Concord, from 1857 to 1880, that she established her name in literature. Nearly all her best books were written there, most of them in the Orchard House. Her experience as a hospital nurse during the Civil War, out of which grew her first successful book, "Hospital Sketches," was a brief one, continuing only from Dec. 12, 1862, until Jan. 21, 1863. Its immediate result was a severe attack of typhoid pneumonia, which continued through delirium and slow recovery until April, 1863, when she was able to take up the pen and to prepare for publication the letters she had written home during her few weeks in a Washington hospital. This was done; and I printed them the following summer in the columns of the "Boston Commonwealth," — a weekly newspaper established by the friends of emancipation in 1862, to urge freedom for the slaves as a measure of the war for the Union.¹

¹ The first editor of the "Commonwealth" in its weekly form (it was a revival, in name and character, of the "Daily Commonwealth" which the antislavery men of Boston had published ten years before) was Moncure D. Conway, a Vir-

The first sketch was printed May 22, 1863, and they ran on until June 26. In the same journal I was printing those chapters of Mr. Alcott's diary which were then called "The Countryman in his Garden and Orchard," and which afterward appeared in the volume "Concord Days," along with some of the conversations of earlier years, and some later conversations which took place in Boston in the winter of 1862-1863. Louisa Alcott followed up her "Hospital Sketches" in

ginian, who had studied divinity at Harvard while I was in college, had become intimate with the Concord Transcendentalists (living some time in that town), and had afterward preached antislavery and reformatory sermons at Washington and Cincinnati. He invited Miss Alcott to write for his newspaper, before I succeeded him as editor, in February, 1863; and one of her stories, the plot turning on slavery, was published by Mr. Conway in January and February, 1863, while she was still lying ill with fever. In her diary for April, 1863, she says: "Sanborn asked me to do what Conway suggested before he left for Europe; namely, to arrange my letters in printable shape, and put them in the 'Commonwealth.' They thought them witty and pathetic. I did n't, but I wanted money; so I made three 'Hospital Sketches. Much to my surprise they made a great hit, and people bought the papers faster than they could be supplied. The second, 'A Night,' was much liked, and I was glad; for my beautiful John Sulie was the hero, and the praise belonged to him. More were wanted; and I added a postscript in the form of a letter, which finished it up, as I then thought." They were republished soon after by James Redpath, then a Boston publisher.

the "Commonwealth," with a series of "Letters from the Mountains;" and in the same journal was printed her "Golden Wedding," which later appeared among her sketches.

These first years of family life at the Orchard House, although not years of outward prosperity, were a season of great importance for the literary activity and the personal enjoyment of the Alcott family. The early circle of friends who had found Concord so delightful from 1840 to 1848 was still unbroken by death, — for only Margaret Fuller, who was shipwrecked in 1850, had passed away; and Hawthorne, after his long residence in Europe, was returning to spend the rest of his life at Concord. Emerson was in his most active career as a public teacher by lectures and discourses; Thoreau also lectured frequently, and was making those observations on Nature and Man which since his death have filled so many volumes; and Ellery Channing, after a short absence in New Bedford, where he edited a newspaper, had returned to Concord, and was living in the immediate neighborhood of Thoreau. Mrs. Ripley, that learned lady, who read Greek for pleasure, dwelt in the Old Manse, with her daughters near her; and Elizabeth Hoar, since her father's death in 1856, was occupying his hospitable house, and joining in the studies and pursuits of her friends,

young and old. The children of the Concord families were growing up; and their amusements, with those of their companions, gave an air of liveliness to the quiet town which it scarcely had before or afterward. The school with which I was connected, and the town schools, of which for several years Mr. Alcott and two or three friends had the direction, realized in some degree his early theory of what schools should be; and they reappear with some embellishment in Miss Alcott's books describing the adventures of her family. Mr. Alcott had been appointed, in 1859 or earlier, superintendent of the dozen public schools which Concord then maintained in the village and in the outlying districts of Barrett's Mill, Bateman's Pond, Factory Village, Nine-Acre Corner, East Quarter, and North Quarter of the extensive township. He gave much time to this renewal of his educational tasks; and his influence on the schools and the children, both directly and through their teachers, was very noticeable. Visitors thronged the village then, as since; but they were then visitors of friendship rather than of curiosity. In a letter of Sept. 17, 1860, Louisa Alcott says of her own household:

“Saturday we had J. G. Whittier, Charlotte Cushman, Miss Stebbins the actress, and Mr. Stuart, conductor of the underground railroad in this charming free country.

So you see our humble place of abode is perking up ; and when the great ' authoress and artist ' are fairly out of the shell, we shall be an honor to our country and terror to the foe." ¹

The simple but romantic life of this village, this family, and this circle of friends gave Louisa Alcott her opportunity as an author ; and for this she was indebted not so much to her own studies or even to her own character as to the character of her father and mother, and the events of their

¹ In a letter of Ellery Channing's to Hawthorne, written a fortnight earlier (Sept. 3, 1860), he said : " In numbering over the things that have been added to the town since you left us for England, I left out the first and best, which is the school for girls and boys under the charge of X. The scholars are from desirable families, and many of them are very attractive and pleasing persons. I have never heard of a school before where there was so much to please and so little to offend ; and in this country, to every one who purposes to take the least part in any social affairs, the value of a good school is unquestioned. Our school-days are *the* days of our life ; it is then we learn all we ever know, and without these mimic contests, these services, sports and petty grievances, what were all the after days ? Nothing seems to me more unfortunate in this land of activity than to bring up children in seclusion, without the invaluable discipline that a good school presents. . . . I am a little late in welcoming you back to the stern and simple fields of this ancient Puritan land ; but a traveller is like coffee, and needs to be well settled." The three children of Mr. Hawthorne — Una, Julian, and Rose — made an important part of the charming circle in which the Alcott sisters then moved.

checkered life. No experience, great or small, elevating or humiliating, through which they had passed, was lost upon her; and all went to form that attractive picture which, as drawn by her pen, has made Concord a place of deep interest to myriads of young people. A higher interest attaches to Mr. Alcott's own writings, not because they are fascinating in style, or thrilling with incident, but because they exhibit that simple and lofty nature, incapable of turning this world to practical account, but equal to the inspiration of his age, which produced so deep an impression on thoughtful youths and maidens who heard his conversations.¹

¹ The testimony of Dr. Harris on this point, as given by him in the beginning of his chapter which closes this volume, is much to the purpose; and so are the words of Mr. Albee, the poet and essayist, spoken at the memorial service in honor of Mr. Alcott, held by the Concord School of Philosophy at the Town Hall, in the summer of 1888. "The young men of the middle of this century who were known to be under the influence of Alcott were thought to have relinquished their heritage, and all chance of profitable careers. The Church had not then emancipated itself from its superstitions; the State was proslavery; our learning and literature rudimentary. The United States were enslaved, spiritually and intellectually. . . . We believed in the word of this prophet without a sign. It little mattered that we did not always comprehend him, so long as we accepted the interior spiritual sign of affiliation with his nature and its aspiration. He was the friend of the spirit; this much it was easy to understand, and thus we sought his presence with a pure

One of these younger hearers, who came to the knowledge of Mr. Alcott's thoughts twenty years later than Mr. Albee, says:—

“I am one of those who believe that Mr. Alcott's name will not soon die out, but will rather become more and more important in the history of New England thought, and in relation to the group of remarkable men with whom he was contemporaneous. Dr. Harris always said that a talk by Mr. Alcott in his youth was one of the first and most powerful stimuli he received in the direction of the spiritual interpretation of the universe; and he called Mr. Alcott his ‘spiritual father.’ I used to tell them both that this made Mr. Alcott my ‘spiritual grandfather.’ I remember when Dr. McCosh made his flying trip to the Concord School from Princeton (you will remember how he mildly patronized and rather loftily criticised the school) that I happened to be standing on the steps with Mr. Alcott, in conversation with Dr. McCosh, who remarked that he had expected to see young men at the school, and challenged Mr. Alcott to prove its influence by its power to attract young men. Mr. Alcott threw his arm around my purpose of sharing his light,—for encouragement, and the enlargement of our narrow destiny.” Another young person wrote, at first hearing him: “The evening at Mr. Alcott's was the most wonderful which I ever passed. E. says it was the finest conversation ever held by him. I had been disappointed so many times about going—and now I could not help saying to myself, ‘Wait, wait, and all good things shall come unto thee.’”

neck, and said, 'We will begin here; here is one of the founders of the school and one of its most faithful friends.'"¹

This is as good a place as any to mention the real origin of that Summer School at Concord, which did more than anything else during the last ten years of Mr. Alcott's life to bring him into connection with literature, although he wrote little for publication during that period, except his Sonnets and the unfinished autobiography in verse, from which quotations were made in the first chapter. He wrote for one of its sessions, in memory of Emerson, that poetical monody, "Ion," in which appears not only a friend's tribute to a friend, but the full significance of that philosophy of pre-existence which Alcott revived in our century, and gave to it a currency such as Pythagoras, Plato, and Plotinus had given in their times. The Concord School was no sudden thought of younger men; but this actual "Summer School of Philosophy and Literature," at Concord, which held its first session in Mr. Alcott's library at the Orchard House, in 1879, was in truth the develop-

¹ Letter of C. H. Amos, Sept. 23, 1892. Nothing could be more characteristic of the formal, opinionated, condescending Scotch philosophy, and the serene and lofty contemplation of Alcott's theory of the universe, than the interview between Dr. McCosh and his host.

ment of a germ planted by Alcott and Emerson fifty years ago, as may be seen by this letter from Emerson to Margaret Fuller, written in August, 1840:—

“Alcott and I projected the other day a whole university out of our straws. George Ripley, Henry Hedge, Theodore Parker, Mr. Alcott, and I shall in some country town—say, Concord or Hyannis—announce that we shall hold a semester for the instruction of young men, say, from October to April. Each shall announce his own subject and topics, with what detail he pleases, and shall hold, say, two lectures or conversations thereon each week; the hours being so arranged that any pupil may attend all, if he please. We may on certain evenings combine our total force for conversations; and on Sunday we may meet for worship, and make the Sabbath beautiful to ourselves. The terms shall be left to the settlement of the scholar himself. He shall understand that the teachers will accept a fee, and he shall proportion it to the sense of benefit received, and his means. Suppose, then, that Mr. Ripley should teach the History of Opinion, Theology, Modern Literature, or what else; Hedge, Poetry, Metaphysics, Philosophy of History; Parker, History of Paganism, of the Catholic Church, the Modern Crisis,—in short, ecclesiastical history; Alcott, Psychology, Ethics, the Ideal Life; and I, Beaumont and Fletcher, Percy’s Reliques, Rhetoric, Belles Lettres. Do you not see that by the addition of one or two chosen persons we

might make a puissant faculty, and front the world without charter, diploma, corporation, or steward? Do you not see that if such a thing were well and happily done for twenty or thirty students only at first, it would anticipate by years the education of New England? Now do you not wish to come here and join in such a work? We shall sleep no more, and we shall concert better houses, economies, and social modes than any we have seen."

At the time this plan was formed, Alcott had but lately come to live in Concord, — having given up reluctantly his school for children in Boston, where he fancied he was laying the foundation of a broad and generous spiritual education for the American people. That experiment failed, under the outcry of illiberal persons in Boston, who professed to think that Alcott was corrupting the youth of the modern Athens by his Socratic conversation.

It was something different from the New England Lyceum which Alcott had in view in his Concord School, for conversation was there to take the place of formal lecture and polemical debate. Three years before this letter of Emerson's was written, Alcott wrote in his diary (December, 1837): —

"I have long deemed conversation one of the most effectual organs of instruction; and if it can be con-

ducted before numbers without losing its charm of simplicity (upon which all its force depends), it might be made most conducive to public benefit; and supply, as a means of culture, the place of popular lectures, discourses, and books. Their influence is often of a passive nature, or serves to lull the soul into vague dreams of knowledge and virtue. Conversation, enlisting the faculties of several persons, provoking discussion, and affording the chance of free intercourse between mind and mind, banishes all such effects and gives life and light to truth. The fitness of our English tongue for this end is seldom shown forth; and perhaps no readier mode of bringing my views before the public and of testing their reception, could be chosen. I should thus publish and try my ideas before sending them to the press; and the freedom of comment would open to me choice insights into the human soul, both in its popular and recluse aspects. Here in free, spontaneous speech, should I give utterance to myself, and amidst the light of human countenances compose passages for future works. It was thus, doubtless, that Plato composed his divine dialogues, embodying the wisdom and wit of his own age along with the lore of antiquity. He reproduced the sentiments and words of his wise interlocutors,—a worthy sample of the ancient style of conversation, with specimens of dialectic. Besides, we have a sacred example in the records of the Gospels,—those divine colloquies of Him whose mind was furnished above all precedent for the grace of conversation. But one difficulty stares me in the face,

— to find those ready and competent to sustain such an enterprise. I could not rely on the audience without exposure to defeat; for carping or ill-disposed persons might intrude to throw stumbling-blocks in the way. Something may be done to prevent this by tickets of admission, excluding those who are not earnest seekers, or who have cherished creeds to defend. I have small confidence in lecturing, except in singular instances, as of Emerson, for example, who approaches near the style of conversation, and by the force of his thought and his grace of manner quickens the faculties and suggests thought."

No better description could be given of the success and failure of Alcott's conversations, or of the marked success which attended this method at the Concord School of Philosophy. The enterprise, as practically established, was a consequence of the long summer visit made by Dr. Jones, the Illinois Platonist, to Concord, in 1878. His readings from Plato, with the conversations ensuing, at the houses of Alcott, Emerson, Edward Hoar, and others in Concord, showed that there was an audience for such themes, and that Concord was a good place to begin the experiment. Nothing so rounded out Alcott's long life of philosophic speculation as this brilliant school, which found its modest Academy between the orchard and pine grove of the Connecticut idealist; and

few utterances are more pathetically beautiful than those with which Alcott celebrated his departed friend, at its summer session of 1882: —

“Come, then, Mnemosyne! and on me wait,
As if for Ion’s harp thou gav’st thine own;
Recall the memories of man’s ancient state,
Ere to this low orb had his form dropt down,
Clothed in the cerements of his chosen fate;
Oblivious here of heavenly glories flown,
Lapsed from the high, the fair, the blest estate,
Unknowing these, and by himself unknown:
Lo! Ion, unfallen from his lordly prime,
Paused in his passing flight, and giving ear
To heedless sojourners in weary time,
Sang his full song of hope and lofty cheer;
Aroused them from dull sleep, from grisly fear,
And toward the stars their faces did uprear.

“Why didst thou haste away, ere yet the green
Enamelled meadow, the sequestered dell,
The blossoming orchard, leafy grove were seen
In the sweet season thou hadst sung so well?
Why cast this shadow o’er the vernal scene?
No more its rustic charms of thee may tell,
And so content us with their simple mien.
Was it that memory’s unrelinquished spell
(Ere man had stumbled here amid the tombs)
Revived for thee that Spring’s perennial blooms,
Those cloud-capped alcoves where we once did dwell?
Translated wast thou in some rapturous dream?
Our once familiar faces strange must seem,
Whilst from thine own celestial smiles did stream!

“I tread the marble leading to his door
(Allowed the freedom of a chosen friend).

He greets me not as was his wont before,
The Fates within frown on me as of yore, —
Could ye not once your offices suspend?
Had Atropos her severing shears forbore!
Or Clotho stooped the sundered thread to mend!
Yet why dear Ion's destiny deplore?
What more had envious Time himself to give?
His fame had reached the ocean's farthest shore, —
Why prisoned here should Ion longer live?
The questioning Sphinx declared him void of blame,
For wiser answer none could ever frame;
Beyond all time survives his mighty name.

“Now pillowed near loved Hylas’¹ lowly bed,
Beneath our aged oaks and sighing pines,
Pale Ion rests awhile his laurelled head;
(How sweet his slumber as he there reclines!)
Why weep for Ion here? He is not dead,
Naught of him Personal that mound confines;
The hues ethereal of the morning red —
This clod embraces never, nor enshrines.
Away the mourning multitude hath sped,
And round us closes fast the gathering night,
As from the drowsy dell the sun declines.
Ion hath vanished from our clouded sight, —
But on the morrow, with the budding May,
A-field goes Ion, at first flush of day,
Across the pastures on his dewy way.”

This was the last literary work of Mr. Alcott, for he was correcting the proof of this in October, 1882, when attacked by the apoplectic stroke that deprived him of the physical power and mental initiative needful for further authorship. He in-

¹ Thoreau's grave is near Emerson's.

deed wrote two sonnets just before his attack, which were left unfinished and published with his revision during his illness; but "Ion, a Monody," was his last finished poem.

It is idle to say that the author of the lines just quoted could not write. He could seldom write consecutively so as to command the attention of the multitude; but there are passages in his books, and unpublished pages that will be remembered (so far as a contemporary can predict the fortune of literature) when the great mass of the books produced in the nineteenth century have been forgotten. All experience teaches the futility of striving to fix the exact rank, with posterity, of authors we have personally known; but there are certain signs of perpetuity which the student of philosophy and literature learns to recognize; and it has happened, more often than the contrary, that the neglected author of one century has been the popular favorite of another. The Concord authors in general took little part in the dispute for fame with their own age; if anything, their ambition was too small, and they cared so slightly for reputation as to neglect most of the ways in which contemporary glory is acquired. Viewed with the eye of the public, and judged by its standard of success, most of them failed in their worldly career. Hawthorne, after

a long period of obscurity, at last succeeded in literature; and Emerson — who alone of these men had a private fortune, small but sufficient — early achieved such success as he desired. But Thoreau, who in early life made some faint essays toward literature as a paid occupation, was only too happy not to succeed; and Channing held a similar attitude toward journalism, in which, ever and anon, he made a false start or a serious endeavor. Alcott, as we have seen, attempted education for his profession, but found the world unready where his capacity lay, and himself incapable where the world's readiness was. Like Channing, although not quite so willing to accept the unobserved pathway of life, Alcott yielded to his lot with tolerable patience, and constantly sought that career of studious leisure and friendly companionship which should be the ideal of scholars. His gift of expression was not so much for writing as for speech, and conversation was his fine art; but at intervals during his whole life, he had written verses worthy of notice;¹ and when his career was

¹ Some of these verses will be found quoted by Dr. Harris in his chapter on Alcott's philosophy, of which they are, like passages in Emerson's poems, the most condensed expression, and the likeliest to survive. But there are many other verses, that may some day be published, either by themselves, or along with the unpublished verse of Thoreau, with which they are in strong contrast, even when inspired by the same sentiment.

closing, he stood forth, at the age of eighty, as a poet of no mean rank. His theme was friendship; and his best skill was to draw the portraits of his friends in a series of sonnets, one of which, read by him at Emerson's funeral, was soon after expanded into the monody just named.

There is, however, a peculiar property attaching to men of thought, and producing results in literature long after their death, which belonged to Alcott as well as to Emerson, and was with them a manifestation of those parts of their philosophy, more or less occult, that did not find fit expression in words. It was a fancy of Bacon's, which Emerson loved to quote, that manifest virtues procure reputation, occult ones fortune; or, as the wise Englishman phrased it in his Essays, "Overt and apparent virtues bring forth praise; but there be secret and hidden virtues that bring forth fortune,—certain deliveries of a man's self that have no name." A great part of fortune, whether in one's own age or with posterity, is influence; and history is full of examples, conspicuous even in literature, of men whose influence and reputation far exceed their recorded deeds or extant writings. Sir Philip Sidney is perhaps the best illustration of this in English literature, and Sappho among the Greek poets; but something of the same kind is noticeable in regard to these

Concord authors of a literature, slender perhaps, but permanent, that appeals no less to the affections than to the intellect. Those who knew by personal acquaintance these poets and essayists, with their circle, will remember in their characters the truth and geniality which their writings display. They might be victims of temperament, as they sometimes complained,—cold or shy or contradictory in mood,—but they approached the problems of life and the duties of friendship with a sincerity, a tolerance, a sacred ardor, and a cheerful courage that would alone give them rank in literature, as it has given immortality to Sidney. His books are seldom read; and a noble verse or phrase, quoted now and then, could not so perpetuate his undying memory, were it not for that aroma of character, that “plain, heroic magnitude of mind,” which avails, in letters no less than in affairs, to carry a great name down to posterity.

There is an Indian legend concerning Concord in King Philip’s War, which seems to point towards its future position in philosophy and literature, quite as much as to its renown for the Christian virtues in that bloody time. The Indians, though dealing barbarously with the neighboring villages, regarded Concord with favor; and while every town near by — Sudbury, Stow,

Chelmsford, Lancaster, Groton, and Woburn — was the scene of savage massacre, Concord alone was spared from a general attack. The story goes that the Indians, after burning Lancaster and Groton, came down along the Assabet over the hills of Stow, and looked off upon Concord and Sudbury to see which they should first assault, when a chieftain said: “We shall never prosper if we go to Concord,—the great Spirit loves that town; they have a good man there,—he great pray!”

The piety of Alcott and Emerson, and even of Thoreau, notwithstanding his odd ejaculations, is the most striking feature of their character; and they felt, no doubt, the force of Dr. Channing’s remark, “that philanthropy, sustained by religion, is a more durable and a nobler excitement than literature, furnishing the mind and heart with more unfailing objects of interest.” It was to “philanthropy sustained by religion” that Alcott turned for support in his darkest days; and like Emerson, like Carlyle, he had reached his initial point in philosophy through Calvinism, quite as much as through the heretical speculation of the Gnostics. He was also deeply impressed by the simple theology of the Quakers, and could have said unaffectedly, with John Woolman, of New Jersey:—

“There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names ; it is, however, pure, and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion, nor excluded from any, when the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, they become brethren. That state in which every motion from the selfish spirit yieldeth to pure love, I may acknowledge with gratitude to the Father of Mercies is often opened before me as a pearl to seek after.”

Dr. Harris, remarking on Alcott's philosophy, speaks of the Hebrew ideal long held before him; and Julian Hawthorne has described his father as possessing “the immitigable conscience of a Puritan.” This Puritan conscience was characteristic of the whole Concord circle, and has made their books of high ethical value, whatever may be thought of their literary or philosophic merit. No one of them could be justly charged with lowering the moral standard; and their influence, as a whole, helped to raise the level of popular opinion to the height required for the great political changes of the past thirty years. Our lamented Curtis well showed, in his funeral oration on Wendell Phillips, how almost impossible it seemed fifty years ago to check the overgrown power of the slaveholding oligarchy that ruled our country

then; yet the growth of that power was checked at first, and then the sceptre was torn from its grasp, by a simple appeal to this same "immitigable Puritan conscience." In this appeal Alcott and his friends had their proper share, but their own work was of a different cast. They had little to do with political agitation, to which they were quite averse; but they sought to make the individual man a self-governing republic, always on the side of freedom and of God. So far from being atheists, as was ignorantly charged, they often seemed to be the only true believers. They rested firmly and confidently on the love of God; their appeal was made to the deepest sentiments of the heart; and they had that patience and that trust in the future which held the defeat and disappointment of to-day as only a surer evidence of final victory. This made them prophetic, as the most earnest and devout men commonly are. Writing in 1839 of the new views held by himself and his friends, Alcott said in his diary: —

"There is scarce a pulpit or a periodical in which these claims will be urged. The popular feeling will oppose it; it will be hunted out of education. Emerson, Clarke, William Channing, Dwight, Parker, Robbins are the only names now sponsor for it; and some of these may be found faithless in the sequel. Yet I look for brilliant success after a while; it must com-

mend itself to the hearts of the pure, the hopes of the noble, the intellect of the wise. A panic of fear and execration may herald its adoption; but this will soon subside, and the minds of the good, the heroic, the true, will find joy in it. It is a ray of divine light shining forth from the soul of the Godlike."

The slight exaggeration of sentiment in this statement cannot conceal its essential truth, which the next forty years hastened to verify. The movement portrayed by Alcott, and vaguely known as Transcendentalism, made its way forward amid fierce opposition. In this contest between the New and the Old, — of the moral sentiment against traditional opinion and vested abuses, — Hawthorne took little part, though he was at heart of the same faith with his Concord friends, and breathed in the same inspiration from the free air and tranquil scenery. The Civil War came in due time. But the Transcendental movement hardly contemplated battle and armed revolution. It dealt rather with the sword of the spirit, and proceeded in methods that uplift and transform. At its outset it might have been addressed as Cowley chanted to Hobbes in his three-decked and three-masted Leviathan of metaphysics: —

"Thy nobler vessel the vast ocean tries,
And nothing sees but seas and skies,

Till unknown regions it descries, —

Thou great Columbus of the land of new philosophies ! ” ¹

Nothing could be more dissimilar than the “new philosophies” of Hobbes and of the Concord men. Thoreau, in one of his paradoxical essays, still unprinted, speaking of the Brave Man, by which term he signified the Philosopher, said :

“ His bravery deals not so much in resolute action as in healthy and assured rest ; its palmy state is a staying at home and compelling alliance in all directions. So stands his life to Heaven, as some fair sunlit tree against the western horizon ; and by sunrise it is planted on some eastern hill, to glisten in the first rays of the dawn. The brave man braves nothing ; nor knows he of his bravery. He is that sixth champion against Thebes, whom the poet described (when the proud devices of the rest have been recorded) as bearing a full-orbed shield of solid brass, —

But there was no device upon its circle ;

For not to seem just, but to be, is his wish.

The golden mean, in ethics as in physics, is the centre of the system, and that about which all revolves ; and though to a distant and plodding planet it be the uttermost extreme, yet one day, when that planet’s year is complete, it will be found central. We shall not attain

¹ Cowley’s “Pindarique Ode to Mr. Hobs,” Stanza IV. Another passage fits in equally well with the Transcendentalists :

“ ’T is only God can know

Whether the fair *idea* thou dost show,

Agree entirely with his own or no.”

to the spherical by lying on one or the other side for an eternity ; but only by resigning ourselves to the law of gravity in us, shall we find our axis coincident with the celestial axis ; and by revolving incessantly through all circles, acquire a perfect sphericity. Mankind, like the earth, revolve mainly from west to east, and so are flattened at the poles. But does not philosophy give hints of a movement, commencing to be rotary at the poles too, which in a millennium will have acquired increased rapidity, and help restore our equilibrium ? And when at length every star in the *nebulæ* and Milky Way has looked down with mild radiance for a season, exerting its whole influence as the pole star, the demands of science will in some degree be satisfied."

Emerson, at New York, in 1843, laughing at Albert Brisbane, the American disciple of Fourier, mentions his description of "the self-augmenting potency of the solar system, which is destined to contain one hundred and thirty-two bodies, I believe," and his urgent inculcation of our "stellar duties." But the Transcendentalists interpreted the Elizabethan poet literally when he said, "Man is his own star," and treated each other as a planet might deal with fixed or wandering stars. Courage and Necessity were their familiar spirits ; and so Thoreau says, in the same essay : —

"The Romans made Fortune surname to Fortitudo ; for fortitude is that alchemy which turns all things to

good fortune. If we will, every bark may carry Cæsar and Cæsar's fortune. For an impenetrable shield, stand inside yourself; he was no artist, but an artisan, who first made shields of brass. For armor of proof I wrap myself in my virtue.

‘Tumble me down, and I will sit
Upon my ruins, smiling yet.’

What first suggested that necessity was grim, and made Fate to be so fatal? Necessity is my eastern cushion, on which I recline. My eye revels in its prospect as in the summer haze; I ask no more but to be left alone with it. It is the bosom of time and the lap of eternity. To be necessary is to be needful, and necessity is only another name for inflexibility of good. How I welcome my grim fellow, and walk arm in arm with him! Let me too be such a necessity as he. I leap and dance in his midst, and play with his beard till he smiles. I greet thee, my elder brother! who with thy touch ennobles all things. Then it is holiday when naught intervenes betwixt me and thee. *Must* it be so? then it is good. The stars are thy interpreters to me.”

Necessity, and of many unwelcome sorts, was the lot of the Alcotts in Concord for the ten years between 1858, when they first occupied the Orchard House, and 1868, when good fortune came to them in the success of Louisa's “Little Women,” which was sent to Roberts Brothers in July, 1868, and published the following October. She said of it very truly,

as she sent it forth: "We really lived most of this book; and if it succeeds, that will be the reason." From that time forward Fortune, as Thoreau says, "was surname to Fortitude;" and rich was the long-deferred result of magnanimity in the whole family. Under the impulse given by Louisa's literary success, her father again began to publish books, and towards the end of 1868 copyrighted his "Tablets," which was nearly half made up of the essays I had printed (1863) in the "Boston Commonwealth." This was followed in 1872 by "Concord Days," which also contained much from the "Commonwealth" essays, and from the privately printed essay on Emerson,¹ which was

¹ This was written at intervals before 1865, and exquisitely printed, with its motto from Plato, which I translated for the author from the "Phædrus," at the expense of Mrs. George Stearns, of Medford, who sent it as a birthday present first to Mrs. Emerson, and afterward to the poet himself, who acknowledged it in a characteristic note. Mrs. Stearns, years afterward, in sending a copy of this note to Louisa Alcott, said: "The date of the letter requires explanation. You will observe it is July 5, when his birthday was May 23. We first sent (rather, your father sent) the little russet volume to Mrs. Emerson, just to feel his way. Then I ventured the beautiful presentation copy, with a basket of flowers in which it lay hidden, which brought the recognition. Your father has a copy like it, as handsome as anything that ever came from an American printing-house. Mr. Welch told me that he ordered the workmen 'not to touch it with anything but white kid gloves.' Your

republished by Mr. Alcott, in 1882, after Emerson's death. Then came a reprint, in 1874, of Miss Peabody's "Record of Mr. Alcott's School;" in 1877, just before Mrs. Alcott's death, his "Table-Talk," containing his last published utterances on "The Lapse" and "Pre-Existence," and closing with this Orphic verse: —

"Heart, my heart, whose pulses' play
Repeats each moment's destiny,
Dost all thy life's terrestrial day
Dial on time my past eternity."

Early in 1882 he published his "Sonnets and Canzonets," sending a copy containing three sonnets on Emerson to his old friend early in April. Emerson dying April 27, Mr. Alcott wrote a fourth sonnet, which was read at the funeral, and afterward added to the volume. He had privately printed, in 1881, the first part of his "New Connecticut," which was afterward published, during his long illness, but with his full knowledge and approval, in 1887.

father told me that Mr. Emerson was pleased with the note which accompanied the book, telling Mr. Alcott he must see it." In publishing this, the last year of his literary activity, Mr. Alcott made a few changes. He had just finished reading the proof of the reprint when he was attacked with apoplexy, and I read for him during the period when he could not speak, and could see with difficulty the proof-sheets of his "Ion," which followed it in the same volume.

The books written by the Alcott family — including eight or ten published by Mr. Alcott, between twenty-five and thirty published or written by Louisa, and one or two written by May — fill two shelves of the alcove devoted to Concord authors in the library of the town where so many of them were written. Scarcely any family in America has published more volumes, and no portion of our New England literature is more characteristic, or will furnish more material for the future critic, than these books. But the best writer in the Alcott family was she who never published a book, and perhaps never thought of writing one. — Mrs. Alcott, whose literary gift was greater than that of her famous daughter, or that of her more original husband. This may be conjectured from such letters of hers as appear in this volume; and it was the opinion of her family and her most intimate friends, although it would have been impossible to persuade herself of it. Mr. Alcott's felicity was in the spoken word; and I cannot agree with Dr. Harris, that he ever wrote so eloquently as he talked. Like Wendell Phillips, of whom Alcott said, "Many are the friends of his golden tongue," he fell below his mark whenever he held the pen.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CLOSING YEARS.

IF we except the wearisome period of illness, extending from Oct. 24, 1882, to March 4, 1888, the later years of Bronson Alcott's life were singularly complete and felicitous. What he had anticipated and aimed at in youth and middle life had come to pass in his old age, — not exactly as he had projected it, but in certain results far beyond his temporal expectation. For who could have foreseen in 1835, when Garrison was so near death in Boston, or in 1859, when John Brown was executed in Virginia, that the great sin of slavery would have been removed and expiated in the lifetime of Alcott? Upon reading his last completed work, the "Sonnets,"¹ at the

¹ In the Diary for Sept. 5, 1881, before he had quite finished these poems, Mr. Alcott writes thus of them: "Choice sonnets, and tender too. I wish I may not intrude, in my thought even, upon the delicacy of a sentiment so absorbing and so delightful as these offerings would sing. Numbering now the mystic XIV., it were perhaps superfluous to add thereto. I am indebted to my friend Sanborn for suggestions and corrections, sometimes of lines even, and for the

close of 1881, I addressed him a note, which was prefixed to the volume, and which described his attitude at the age of eighty-two towards the present and the past: —

“ To you belongs the rare good fortune (good genius, rather) that has brought you in these late days into closer fellowship than of yore with the active and forth-looking spirit of the time. In youth and middle life you were in advance of your period, which has only now overtaken you when it must, by the ordinance of Nature, so soon bid you farewell, as you go forward to new prospects, in fairer worlds than ours. It is this union of youth and age, of the past and the present, — yes, and the future also, — that I have admired in these artless poems, over which we have spent together so many agreeable hours. Fallen upon an age in literature when the poetic form is everywhere found, but the discerning and inventive spirit of Poesy seems almost lost, I have marked with delight in these octogenarian verses, flowing so naturally from your pen, the very contradiction of this custom of the period. I perceive how the high sentiment by which you have from youth been inspired may become the habitual movement of the mind, at an age when so many, if they live at all in spirit, are but nursing the selfish and distorted fancies of morose singularity. To you the world has been

Greek title to them, — *Anathemata* (Offerings as to a Divinity). — *Aug.* 12, 1882. “ The Emerson gift essay, with the *Monody*, is in press, to appear in the style of the sonnets.”

a brotherhood of noble souls, — too few, as we thought, for your companionship, — but which you have enlarged by the admission to one rank of those who have gone, and of those who remain to love you and listen to your oracles. The men and the charming women who recognized your voice when it was that of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare ye the way of our Lord,’ are joined in your commemorative sonnets with those who hearken to its later accents, proclaiming the same acceptable year of the Lord. The honors you pay in resounding verse to Channing, to Emerson, to Margaret Fuller, to Hawthorne, Thoreau, and the rest of the company with whom you trod these groves, and honored these altars of the Spirit unnamed, return in their echoes to yourself. They had their special genius, and you yours no less, though it found not the same expression with theirs. We please our love with the thought that in these sonnets and canzonets of affection you have celebrated yourself with them; that the swift insight, the ennobling passion for truth and virtue, the high resolve, the austere self-sacrifice, the gentle submission to a will eternally right, in which these friends, so variously gifted, found a common tie, — all these are yours also, and may they be ours!”

The School of Philosophy, in particular, filled the years from 1878 onward with great satisfaction. Writing to his friend Marston Watson (Aug. 21, 1880), who had congratulated him on its success, Alcott said: —

“Yes, the school is a delight, and a realized dream of happy hours in days of sunshine. Life has been a surprise to me during these latter years, and I allow myself to anticipate yet happier surprises in the future still to be mine.” (March 29, 1882.) “These late months have flattered me with some sonnets addressed to friends, — one to a friend long cherished and held in remembrance, living in retirement at his rural Hillside. A copy will find you as soon as published. The sonnets number many; and I am pleased with having sung, however lispingly, traits most apparent to me in the group of friends it has been my happy fortune to enjoy and love. I wish you would indulge me and your friends by looking at us here in our home. I shall be proud to introduce you to my new study and library.”

This new study was an addition to the Thoreau House, made in the spring of 1882, and paid for from the proceeds of Mr. Alcott's last journey in the Northwest, whither he was in the habit of going every few years, after 1855, — when his first visit ended so scantily in the way of pecuniary reward, as is related from Louisa's journal, in her biography by Mrs. Cheney. But in this last visit, which occupied seven months, — from October, 1880, to May, 1881, and which was made when he was eighty-one years old, — he travelled in the autumn, the severe winter, and the trying spring more than five thousand miles, and lectured,

preached, held conversations, or made addresses at the rate of more than one a day, Sundays included, returning home in sound health, and with \$1,000 which he had earned during this journey, although more than half his public addresses were gratuitous. With this sum, to which Miss Alcott added something, he built the west wing of the Thoreau House, and there established his growing library in the autumn of 1881.¹ There is perhaps no record of so much physical and intellectual effort as this last Western journey required among any of the vigorous old men of the present century.

It was in this new study that Mr. Alcott finished his later poems, including many of the sonnets, and held council with his friends concerning the

¹ The Thoreau House here mentioned is that which was last occupied by the Thoreau family, and where Henry Thoreau died in the spring of 1862. After the death of his mother, about 1872, Sophia Thoreau, who owned it, leased it to me; and after her death in 1876, it was purchased by Mrs. Pratt, Mr. Alcott's eldest daughter, then a widow, for herself, her children, and her father and mother. Mrs. Alcott only occupied it for a week or two, dying in October, 1877; but it continued to be the family home during Mr. Alcott's illness, as it had been through the sessions of the School of Philosophy. The Orchard House, which the Alcotts left in 1877, was opened in 1879 for the first session of this school; and in the next year the Hillside Chapel was built near by, from Mr. Alcott's plans and upon his grounds. Before his death, however, this estate was purchased by Dr. Harris, who also owns the Chapel.

School of Philosophy, of which he was the real founder, and its dean until 1888, when his growing infirmity prevented him from acting. He took part in its lectures and discussions for four years, and even after his illness occasionally attended its sessions. In one of his last letters (to Mrs. Marston Watson), written at the end of the session, in 1882 (August 12), he said:—

“I have a moment, before going to the Chapel this morning, to acknowledge your kind note advising me of Mr. Watson’s illness. You do not say how ill he is; only your fears mingled with expressions of your funny patient’s humors. I should infer that he would take that invading stranger in a jocose mood; and I take it as a hopeful sign. But will you not inform me if anything of the sadder transpires? The School closes this noon. When our invalid is on his feet again, and the School has been put behind a little, I shall like to greet the inmates of dear Hillside again.”¹

¹ As the School of Philosophy attracted much notice in various ways, it may be interesting to give its financial story. It opened July 15, 1879, without funds; its first year’s expenses were \$739, its receipts \$733. I paid the small deficit, being Treasurer; but early in 1880, Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson of New York gave a fund of a thousand dollars (which, being profitably invested by the Trustees, Messrs. Alcott, Emery, and Sanborn, accumulated before July, 1880, to \$1,185); and out of this was paid the cost of building the Chapel in the preceding June, amounting to \$512. The fund balance of \$673 served from that time to secure the

So little did Mr. Alcott anticipate the illness which fell upon him in October, 1882; indeed, he had reason to expect, as he often remarked, that he should live beyond the age of ninety, and might even reach a hundred. He never visited the invalid at Hillside; but in the September following he did revisit, with his only surviving sister, the home of their youth in Wolcott, apparently in good health, and certainly in good spirits. Soon after his return from Connecticut, and while writing the two sonnets on Immortality, which were his last work, he was struck with apoplexy, Oct. 24, 1882, and never entirely recovered from its effects. He at first lost the power of speech and motion, but not for any long time his consciousness; and after a few days he regained the power of speech, though somewhat imperfectly. He continued to gain strength for some months, and for

School from risk, as well as to keep the chapel in repair, increase its furniture, etc., until the School closed in 1888. The receipts of 1880 were \$680, and the expenses \$650; in the succeeding years the rate of payment to lecturers, which had been originally \$10 for each discourse, was increased to \$15; and this ultimately consumed both the annual receipts and the fund balance. It would not have done so, however, but for the fact that we gave away many tickets each year, thereby diminishing our receipts. It was not the purpose of the managers of the School to make money from it; and we closed in 1888 with a balance of thirty-one cents, which the Treasurer put in his pocket as his salary for ten years.

several years was able to see his friends, drive out, and occasionally visit them ; but as he was nearly eighty-three at the time of his attack, the effects of age soon neutralized the recuperative power of his vigorous constitution. From the summer of 1886 he began to decline, and he spent that winter of 1886-1887, and the following one, at his daughter's house in Boston, where he died by gradual decline, March 4, 1888.

The character of Bronson Alcott has perhaps sufficiently appeared in the preceding pages, or may be traced, for its philosophic aspect, in the chapter by Dr. Harris, which follows. But it is fitting that I should now sum up those points in which his life and genius seem to warrant the reputation acquired by him half a century ago, and to which the testimony of Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Lowell, and others was borne at the time.

Without any distinguished literary gift, and quite devoid of the training which best fits the literary man for his task, Alcott yet possessed what many men of letters always lack, — an original and profound habit of mind, directed toward the most serious questions that can occupy human thought. In this rare trait he surpassed nearly all his contemporaries, and equalled those two between whom he stood in age, — Carlyle and Emerson, — and from whom

he differed so much in his intellectual equipment. He had neither the deep-searching imagination of Carlyle, nor his vigorous grasp of language; but he resembled Carlyle in a certain wilfulness as to the choice of language, and much indifference to the habit and expectation of his readers. As an orator he far surpassed Carlyle, and oftentimes seemed to be the equal of any contemporary in the effect which the spoken word produces. But he could not, like Emerson, constantly command his powers; and he had not Emerson's intellectual prudence, which taught him silence when not prepared to utter his best word. It may be well to quote here what Emerson said of him in 1858, summing up his life to that date: —

EMERSON'S SKETCH OF ALCOTT.

(*From Appleton's Cyclopædia*, 1858.)

Like many farmers' sons in Connecticut, while still a boy, he was intrusted by a local trader with a trunk of merchandise, with which he sailed for Norfolk, Va., and which he afterward carried about among the plantations; and his early readings were in the planters' houses, who gave hospitality to the young salesman, and, observing his turn for study, talked with him, and opened their bookcases to him in a stormy day. On his return to Connecticut, he began to teach, and attracted attention by his success with an infant-school.

He removed to Boston in 1828, and showed singular skill and sympathy in his methods of teaching young children of five, six, and seven years, at the Masonic Temple. . . . But the school was in advance of public opinion, and on the publication of his book was denounced by the newspapers of the day. After closing the school, Mr. Alcott removed to Concord, where he betook himself to his studies, interesting himself chiefly in natural theology, and the various questions of reform in education, in diet, in civil and social institutions.

On the invitation of James P. Greaves, of London, the friend and fellow-laborer of Pestalozzi in Switzerland, Mr. Alcott went to England in 1842. Mr. Greaves died before his arrival; but Mr. Alcott was received cordially by his friends, who had given his name to their school at Alcott House, Ham, near London, and spent some months in making acquaintance with various classes of reformers. On his return to America, he brought with him two of his English friends, Charles Lane and H. C. Wright; and Mr. Lane having bought a farm which he called Fruitlands, at Harvard, Mass., they all went there to found a new community. Messrs. Lane and Wright soon returned to England, and the farm was sold. Mr. Alcott removed to Boston, and has led the life of a peripatetic philosopher, conversing in cities and villages, wherever invited, on divinity, on human nature, on ethics, on dietetics, and a wide range of practical questions. These conversations, which were at first casual, gradually assumed a more formal char-

acter, the topics being often printed on cards, and the company meeting at a fixed time and place. Mr. Alcott attaches great importance to diet and government of the body ; still more to race and complexion. He is an idealist, and we should say Platonist, if it were not doing injustice to give any name implying secondariness to the highly original habit of his salient and intuitive mind. He has singular gifts for awakening contemplation and aspiration in simple and in cultivated persons. Though not learned, he is a rare master of the English language, and though no technical logician, he has a subtle and deep science of that which actually passes in thought ; and thought is ever seen by him in its relation to life and morals. Those persons who are best prepared by their own habit of thought set the highest value on his subtle perception and facile generalization.

An occasional error in dates and matters of fact cannot deprive this sketch of its high value ; and upon the points which it covers little more need be said. Yet, since Alcott was for many years, between 1837 and 1870, and even during the later period of the Concord School of Philosophy, the target for much cheap wit and for some censure, as a person who might have many kinds of sense but had not common-sense, something may be added concerning his practical faculty, and his relation to the world of material comfort and prosaic achieve-

ment into which he was born. Few persons would seem to have been so completely outside of their proper time and place as Alcott. He should have inherited ample estates in a society friendly to culture and not inhospitable to thought, — such a position as many English gentlemen have held, and from which they have stepped forth upon occasion to render great service to their country and the world. As Clarendon said of the poet Waller, that he was “a very pleasant discourser, and therefore grateful to all kind of company, where he was not the less esteemed for being very rich;” so it would have been a temporary advantage to Alcott had he possessed an assured income, such as exalts in every Anglo-Saxon mind the worth of opinions that come from men of property. Lord Chatham, dwelling on the merits of the American army under Washington, assured the House of Lords, in the most serious manner, as the highest compliment he could pay, “that the Virginia gentleman who now commands that army has an income of not less than four thousand pounds sterling.” A quarter part of this income would have freed this Connecticut gentleman from three quarters of the ridicule, insult, and odium which vulgar persons in fine linen bestowed upon him.

But Alcott was ever committing a greater sin than poverty against the mercenary standard of

his age and country, and in the eyes of those persons who "counted our life a pastime, and our time here a market for gain." Had they spoken out their thought, they would have used the language of that ancient writer who makes the careless conservatives of Alexandria say of the poor righteous man, —

"He upbraideth us with offending the law, and objecteth the transgressings of our education. He professeth to have knowledge of God: and he calleth himself the child of the Lord. He was made to reprove our thoughts: he is grievous unto us, even to behold. For his life is not like other men, his ways are of another fashion; he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness."

Such would have been a description, almost exact, of the attitude taken by Alcott towards the perishable and shameful civilization of America when he first stood forth as a reformer, and encountered the instinctive opposition of all those to whom that civilization was profitable or dear. That this hostility and misconception of his real purpose (which was high and beneficent) did not drive our philosopher into bitterness or insanity, is one of the surest evidences of his intellectual greatness. He continued to love mankind when they rejected him, for he knew how transient must be that state of things against which his own

simple life was a protest. A critic by no means favorable to him has lately observed that "the secret of Alcott's reserved and tranquil potency was the fact that there lay behind his ideal attitude an unfailing mental and physical courage." There was also a much greater practical faculty — had he not disdained to apply it, preferring the action of loftier powers — than has usually been accorded him. To this the late Dr. Hedge bore witness when he said, in 1888: —

"I can speak with unfeigned admiration of his rare talents. It seemed to me that even Emerson did not rate them as highly as I did. I thought, and think, that if he had chosen to use them venally, to put them to market, he might have earned a handsome support by them. But on the whole Alcott stands in my recollection for the best representative I have known of the spiritual hero. Here was a man who scorned the bribes of earth and the satisfactions of the flesh, whose spirit dwelt on the heights, who sought converse with the heavenly and eternal. He found his *pou sto* in the place allotted to him; and if he did not move the earth with his spiritual lever, he has impressed himself as a grand and significant figure upon his contemporaries."

Along with this heroic and ideal quality, which those who knew him best most surely recognized, there were found other traits more common, and certain foibles that were seized upon by the idle and

self-seeking, to make this spiritual hero appear more like one of themselves. He had a certain egotism, seldom degenerating into vanity, which was not inconsistent with a remarkable modesty and distrust of his own powers, but which sometimes seemed to manifest itself in conceit and love of display. A type of this was his fondness for fine clothes during his Virginia life; and again his readiness in later years to declare himself and present his opinions, whether the company was suitable or not; and this made him susceptible to praise, sometimes, from persons who wished to advance their own cause or interest by the use of his name or the support of his voice. It was this less admirable trait, as well as his just conviction of the importance of ideas cherished by him that led him to thirst so constantly for publication, and for a report of what he had said in his best moods. Thus Emerson writes, in 1838:—

“Alcott wants a historical record of conversations holden by you and me and him. I say, how joyful rather is some Montaigne’s book, which is full of fun, poetry, business, divinity, philosophy, anecdotes, which, dealing of bone and marrow, of corn-barn and flour-barrel, of wife and friend and valet, of things nearest and next, never names names, nor gives you the glories of a recent date or relation, but hangs there in the heaven of letters, unrelated, untimed, a joy and a sign,

an autumnal star. . . . [1866.] You can trace in every man's public speech his opportunities of conversation, — in Ward Beecher's speech, metropolitan conversation: in Goldwin Smith's, Oxford society; in Webster's, the talk of the bar and of commercial and diplomatic society; in Montaigne, in De Retz, in Chesterfield, the man of the world; and so on through them all. In Alcott's speech will not be a syllable of all this, for his practical knowledge is most restricted."

These comments by the exacting and versatile taste of Emerson are mainly just, and yet not wholly so. Alcott's practical knowledge was no more restricted than Emerson's; but he had that intense application of mind to one side of human life which led him to neglect the display of knowledge and the exercise of powers that were amply his. His tendency was not to expand our life into multiplicity, — which was the tendency of Emerson, as it had been of Shakspeare and of Goethe, — but to concentrate multiplicity into unity, and to be seeking constantly the one source from which flow these myriad manifestations. We used to call him, in sport, "the vortical, or identical, philosopher," because his speculations all moved vortically towards a centre, or occupied themselves with repeating one proposition in many forms. So important was this main proposition, and so completely did he belong to the class of religious idealists, that it

was quite as much natural fitness and simplicity, as conceit, which led him to say to Emerson, "You write on the genius of Plato, of Pythagoras, of Jesus; why do you not write of me?"

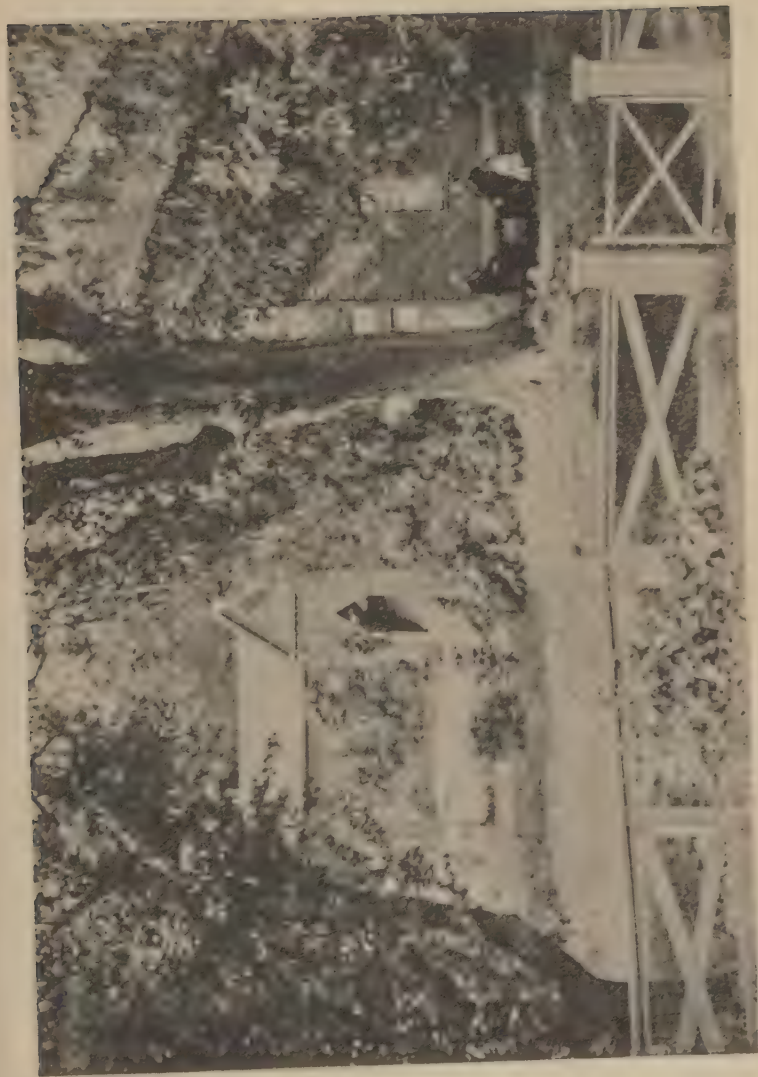
But when we come to the moral qualities and social virtues of Alcott, there is little diminution to be made in the high estimate to which those traits entitled him. He was the most filial son, the most faithful lover, the most attached friend, the most generous philanthropist of his time; and when he died he left fewer enemies than any man of equal age can have provoked or encountered in so long a career. His spiritual brother, Emerson, might have said of him, as he did say of Charles Sumner, and as Burnet said of Sir Isaac Newton, "He had the whitest soul I ever knew."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF BRONSON ALCOTT AND THE
TRANSCENDENTALISTS. BY WILLIAM T. HARRIS.

I. — *First Acquaintance.*

I FIRST saw Mr. Alcott in New Haven, Conn., in the winter of 1856–1857, when I had completed the first term of my junior year at Yale College. An acquaintance of mine who was interested in a series of conversations that had been arranged for Mr. Alcott invited me to attend, and I did so. I found something quite congenial to me. I had begun to inquire after the foundations of customary belief, and, as a natural consequence, was in a state of protest against many of the habits and practices that existed around me. I had been attracted to phrenology; had adopted the diet of the vegetarians; was an ardent advocate of the spelling reform; looked at gymnastics, water-cure, dress reform, mesmerism, and spiritualism as promising a new and better order of things. I was, in short, in that stage of “clearing-up” which the Germans call *Die Aufklärung*. It is an epoch of negation, necessary al-



SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND ORCHARD HOUSE, CONCORD.

ways when one passes to the attitude of insight and reliance on reason, from the attitude of blind obedience to external authority. Hitherto he has followed the paths marked out by prescription; has obeyed the voice of the family, the ethical sense of the community, or the commands of the Church, without questioning the ultimate grounds of their authority. They have given him, after a sort, the net results of the experience of mankind; summing up the lessons of life and death, happiness and woe, error and truth, to the end that he, the individual, may profit by the lives of his fellow-men, and reinforce his little fund of wisdom by the wisdom of the race. Through some defect in our system of education, this period of transition, from blind obedience to authority, to the possession of an insight into what is rational, is accompanied in most cases by a deep-reaching negation or scepticism. The individual denies all that has been taught him by arbitrary authority. He attacks the dicta of unconscious use and wont quite wilfully, for he has not yet acquired any insight into the rationality of the world-order. But these views of the world that have been imposed upon him, and the habits into which he has been trained, are, after all, deeply rational in their structure, although they come to him with an air of dogmatic, unreasoning authority. The youth throws away, accordingly, with

these customary beliefs, the most precious gift that he has ever received, — namely, the tradition of mankind, the aggregated thought of all humanity. It is to be hoped that our pedagogy will make advances along the line of abridging this epoch of negation. What is needed is that the youth shall be taught by the school to find, in his own reason, the necessity for these views and habits that have been forced on him by Family, Civil Society, and Church.

I remember, in Mr. Alcott's conversations, the topics of diet, temperament, and the two orders of knowing. His Pythagorean views of diet were attractive, and his doctrine of the light and dark temperaments seemed to be in conformity with the principles that phrenology taught. The distinction of sense-perception from higher powers of cognition was new, in the form that Mr. Alcott announced it. I had learned the distinction between perceptive and reflective powers in phrenology, — the reflective including "causality" and "comparison." The faculty of "comparison," as taught by Spurzheim, stood for our mental power of discriminating relations between things. Its highest reach should be an insight into the relativity of things, — the dependence of things on their environment. This doctrine, stated in another form, is that of the *phenomenality* of all things. For if all things are rela-

tive, and exist only in a state of dependence on others, then it follows that they are only manifestations of essences or powers hidden behind them, or rather, revealed in them.

The faculty of "causality" was understood by Spurzheim to be a power of discerning causes, and thus a peculiar function of the more general faculty which he had named "comparison." (Gall had called it — comparison — the faculty of analogy; Spurzheim's "causality" was what Gall had named the faculty of Metaphysics.) It would seem that comparison, as perception of relations, would culminate in a perception of the phenomenality of all things ("all things are relative"); and that this culmination would be the faculty of causality. For what is the perception of cause but the perception of the phenomenality of some object? I see that this object is not through itself, but through another, — namely, its cause. The cause possesses essential being; the effect only phenomenal or derivative being.

I mention in detail this phrenological distinction, in order to explain the newness in Mr. Alcott's view of the mind as I first heard it in New Haven. For the phrenologists, one and all, fail to see the consequence of their own definition of faculties. They are so engrossed with making out the map of protuberances on the cranium, that they give

slight attention to a study of the intellectual relation of mental powers that are supposed to dwell in the convolutions underneath those protuberances. A mental faculty, therefore, is conceived by them as a mere force, or even as a thing; not as an intellectual power, that represents a degree of consciousness rather than a separate independent faculty. Thus the phrenologist's "causality," conceived by him as a faculty separate from "comparison," is found in reality to be a higher degree or potency of it, if studied analytically by introspection. Thus, too, the perceptive faculties are only rudiments of the reflective faculties; and the latter are higher degrees of the same activity of perception, rather than independent organs. For example, the faculty of "individuality" (Spurzheim) is said to be the capacity for recognizing and identifying external objects, — the perception of their characteristics and limitations. Since all the properties and characteristics of objects have to do with their relations to other objects, it is evident that such a faculty of individualization can be, after all, only an act of comparison; and it must lead moreover to a perception of causal relations.

This species of indiscriminating psychology which looks upon the mind as a thing, with faculties for its properties, is the possession of most persons in the lowest stage of reflection. It was my own

mental furnishing when I met Mr. Alcott and listened to his conversations. As I listened to him, I began to form some notion of higher native powers in the soul, by which the limits of mere sensuous experience could be passed over or transcended. This glimpse of Transcendentalism was like glad tidings to me. I was tired of commonplace, and yet could not attain to anything essentially new. The new "isms" that I had taken up all related to external matters. They were reforms of the outward dress, new fashions of clothing, but not reforms that led to new mounts of vision. They did not unfold the possibility of infinite growth in insight or will-power.

Fowler's phrenology, it is true, taught the cultivation of the various mental faculties, but rather as muscles than as spiritual sources of power. One could cultivate this or that faculty of memory, this or that faculty of reflection. But inasmuch as the founders of phrenology scarcely knew even the superficial features of the faculties of reflection, how could they tell their disciples what steps must be followed to gain the higher powers of insight? The doctrine of Transcendentalism was just the most needed step in my culture. The obscure depths were illuminated, and I began my descent below the surfaces and illusions of common sensuous experience and tradition.

That part of the conversations which related to diet and temperament and to social reform seemed agreeable, because it was in harmony with my newly adopted "isms." But what I heard on these things was without serious effect on me. It was Mr. Alcott's doctrine of pre-existence, and of the primordial creative power of the soul, which began at once to work a revolution in me. I think that I commenced to perceive the meaning of his statement on the evening of the third conversation; the first and second evenings I had not even noticed that our leader held a view so utterly at variance with that commonly accepted. It had not occurred to me that such a thing could be possible. Even if I had read of Berkeley's idealism, or the philosophy of the Neo-Platonists, it had seemed only an eccentricity of thought, rather than a logical necessity of thinking to be studied and comprehended. But here was a living and commanding personality who held a doctrine of the supremacy of the soul and the ideality of the material world. Idealism was not a mere fanciful theory to him, but the sober truth. I concluded that it was worth my time to understand this strange doctrine, which turned topsyturvy all our current views.

Mr. Alcott talked with me after the conversations, and on the morning that he left New Haven I waited on him to the train. He commended for

my reading Thoreau's "Walden" and Jamblichus's "Life of Pythagoras," of which I now heard for the first time; had much to say too of the writings of Emerson; and I resolved to study them more carefully, for as yet my efforts had not succeeded in getting much nutriment from them. Visiting Boston the following spring, I found a copy of the "Dial" in the library of a friend (Mr. J. D. Baldwin) who had been one of its few subscribers. I sought out Mr. Alcott's "Orphic Sayings," and made a short-hand copy of those that attracted me, for future study. These were thirty-six in number, including among others those on "Calculus" (No. 31), "Nature" (35), "Embryon" (39), "Spirit and Matter" (41), "Person" (56), "The Teacher" (80), "Obituary" (98), and "Eternity" (99). The thirty-first and forty-first aroused what there was in me of speculative power; and as I pondered over the mystic utterances, I really gained in ability to think this new (or old) view of the world. The Orphic Saying on "Spirit and Matter" closes thus:—

"The sensible world is Spirit in magnitude, outspread before the senses for their analysis, but whose synthesis is the soul herself, whose prothesis is God. Matter is but the confine of Spirit, limning her to sense."

I came to see that the world of matter, instead of being the ultimate reality, is only the initial

reality, and in some sort a phenomenon or mere manifestation of a deeper, incorporeal reality of force, or energy, which "limns" itself on our senses.

As I had begun in 1857 to study the philosophy of Kant, and by 1859 had learned something of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, I read into the Orphic Saying on "Calculus" (31) a demand for a dialectical system of pure thought as the first philosophy. It says: —

"We need what genius is unconsciously seeking, and by some daring generalization of the universe shall assuredly discover, a spiritual calculus, a *novum organon*, whereby Nature shall be divined in the soul, the soul in God, matter in Spirit, polarity resolved into unity; and that power which pulsates in all life, animates and builds all organizations, shall manifest itself as one universal deific energy, present alike at the outskirts and centre of the universe, whose centre and circumference are one; omniscient, omnipotent, self-subsisting, uncontained, yet containing all things in the unbroken synthesis of its being."

II. — *Mr. Alcott's Inventory of his Spiritual Real Estate.*

In the winter of 1858-1859 Mr. Alcott came to St. Louis, at my suggestion, and held conversations open to the public. The most impor-

tant were those held in the midst of a small coterie, which included, besides myself, Dr. J. H. Watters, Messrs. H. C. Brockmeyer, S. D. Hayden, H. M. Jones, F. C. Childs, and G. C. Stedman. We were possessed with a sort of philosophical fury, that made life for us not worth living unless consecrated to the study of philosophy. Mr. Alcott found us interested especially in his idealism, and to a less degree in his social views and reforms. On several occasions during his stay in St. Louis he spoke to me of my undertaking some biographical account of him after he should complete his earthly career. On one of these he dictated to me an inventory of his spiritual real estate, which I wrote down in my commonplace book (in short hand); and on reading it to him for verification, he signed his name underneath it. This is the inventory: —

1. Some thoughts on Swedenborg, which Emerson has embodied in his ‘Representative Men.’

2. Some ideas on the spine, — about its being the type of all Nature.

3. The idea of the development of the natural from the Absolute by means of persons.

4. The thought with reference to temptation in the “Orphic Sayings” [No. 12. “Greater is he who is above temptation than he who being tempted overcomes,” etc.; also No. 13, and others, relative to the same thought].

5. The Pantheon of the Mind [arranged as follows]:

Spirit — God.	Fancy — Shapes.
Will — Laws.	Understanding — Things.
Love — Persons.	Memory — Traditions.
Conscience — Right.	Instinct — Embryons.
Imagination — Ideas.	Life — Monads.
Reason -- Truth.	Body — Atoms.
Nature — Matter.	

(Signed) A. BRONSON ALCOTT.

I shall comment on these things, not in the precise order given. But I hasten here to say that the seeming claim made in the first item to some of the ideas on Swedenborg, in Mr. Emerson's "Representative Men," must not be taken as questioning Emerson's perfect right to the use of those ideas as his own. In the greatest essay ever written on the philosophy of Art (that on "Poetry and Imagination," which opens his book entitled "Letters and Social Aims"), Mr. Emerson has enlarged and applied Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences in a wonderful manner, showing how the divine is mirrored in the several devices of art, and how the poet's rhymes and tropes reflect the lofty correspondences between the spirit that creates and the world that is created. In his poems "Merlin" and "Bacchus" he has given the same thought in a more subtle expression; for instance, "Justice is the rhyme of things;" "Nemesis with even

matches odd, and redresses the partial wrong ;”
“ Balance-loving Nature made all things in pairs.”

Now, it is possible that this deeper view of correspondence was suggested by Alcott, much in the form that the “Orphic poet” sang the doctrine quoted in the final chapter of Emerson’s “Nature” : —

“ Man is the dwarf of himself. Once he was permeated and dissolved by Spirit. He filled nature with his overflowing currents. . . . But having made for himself this huge shell, his waters retired. . . . He sees that the structure still fits him, but fits him colossally ; say, rather, that once it fitted him, now it corresponds to him from far and on high.”

This view is not fully unfolded in the “Representative Men,” but is intimated in this sentence borrowed from Plato’s “Meno” (given on page 98, first edition, in quotation marks, but without special mention of the source) : —

“ For all things in nature being linked and related, and the soul having heretofore known all, nothing hinders but that any man who has recalled to mind, or, according to the common phrase, has learned one thing only, should of himself recover all his ancient knowledge, and find out again all the rest, if he have but the courage and faint not in the midst of his researches. For inquiry and learning is reminiscence all.”

Mr. Emerson adds a commentary to the quotation :

“ How much more, if he that inquires be a holy and godlike soul ! For by being assimilated to the original soul, by whom and after whom all things subsist, the soul of man does then easily flow into all things, and all things flow into it : they mix ; and he is present and sympathetic with their structure and law.”

There is certainly no piece of like intensity to be quoted from Swedenborg. This interpretation of Plato may have been suggested by Alcott. The words of the Orphic poet in “ Nature ” are likely not so much the exact words as Emerson’s own restatement of his recollections of the thought delivered by Alcott.

I admit that these ideas of correspondence, which were published first in the poems named, and later in the “ Representative Men,” and in “ Letters and Social Aims,” stand for the fundamental principle of Emerson’s philosophy ; and there is nothing more profound in idealism. Like the philosophy of Schelling, it leans to art and poetry ; for it makes the visible an expression or language of the invisible. Nature is the Word of Spirit. In this respect it varies from Alcott’s idealism, which is not so much æsthetic as ethical and theological.

With regard to the second head of the inventory, — the ideas about the spine as the type of all nature, — I think Mr. Alcott has not preserved in

written form the insights which he had at the time of his illumination. As he intimated to me, that period was one of such long-continued exaltation that his bodily strength gave way under it; and his visions of truth came to have mingled with them spectres which he perceived to be due to physical exhaustion. He saw the entire world as one vast spinal column. It corresponded to the "gifts" in his *Pantheon of the Mind*,—a sort of ascending or descending scale from the Divine Spirit to matter. In his chapter on "Metamorphoses," in "Tablets" (p. 202), he describes the wanderings of the soul in sleep and dreams: "Pursuing our peregrinations, we plunge suddenly into the abyss of origins, transformed for the moment into slumbering *umbilici* [as though we were again embryos in nature, just as before our birth to consciousness as spiritual beings] skirting the shores of our nativity; or ascending spine-wise, traverse the hierarchy of gifts." Here the correspondence of the vertebræ to the gifts is implied. He told me that when he had become almost deranged in his mind through this long-continued period of exaltation and insight into the spine as the type of all nature, and when he had begun to see spectres, his wife "packed him up and sent him down to visit Mr. Emerson." I therefore conceive this insight into the symbolic significance of

the spine to be directly connected with his studies in Swedenborg; and that we have his doctrines of Swedenborg and the archetypal spine only in their results, namely, in the third and fifth items of his inventory, — “the idea of the development of the natural from the Absolute by means of persons,” and the “pantheon of the mind,” called elsewhere “the hierarchy of the gifts” (“Tablets,” p. 179).

The third item in his inventory is the Genesis of Nature through the lapse of personal being from holiness. The fourth item, concerning temptation, likewise is a sort of corollary to the doctrine of lapse. Any one who can be tempted is already fallen, for he must possess lusts of the flesh: if unfallen, or if ascended above evil desires (as the Christian doctrine of regeneration teaches), he is above temptation. It is no temptation to offer pleasures of sin to a divine being, because he discerns therein only hellish torment, seeing the sin in its entire perspective of contradiction to divine freedom.

Only on the basis of the theory of Lapse, however, could one deny the possibility of return to complete holiness. The Orphic Saying (No. 12) affirms: “Greater is he who is above temptation than he who being tempted overcomes. The latter but regains the state from which the former has not

fallen. He who is tempted has sinned ; temptation is impossible to the holy." The meaning of the world of trial and struggle, the meaning of the victory over sin, is not indicated in this. It is, in fact, intimated that there is no significance in it. This is in harmony with the Lapse theory as suggested in the story of Adam's fall given in Genesis, and perhaps in certain of the doctrines of Calvinism ; but is not consonant with the doctrine of evolution nor with the theory implied in the Gospel of Saint John, which makes the world of finitude and evil a creation of the Logos. According to the esoteric philosophy that underlies the Athanasian creed, and the clause *Filioque* added by the Council of Toledo, absolute personal Reason, as God, reflecting on his own being, gives rise to the Logos, or himself as object. He again, together with his object, reflecting on the process of genesis by which the Logos arises, objectifies also that process of genesis or derivation as the *Processio*, or the creation of a world of time and space, always becoming, but never reaching the absolute, except in an absolute Person, beyond itself (nature), as the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the One Divine Being ; double object, because the object of the Logos, who traces his derivation to the First, and also the object of the First, who sees in the Logos the recognition of Himself as Father.

According to this, there is a complete explanation of the origin of finitude and evil. It is all a process of creating new individualities, and endowing them with power to ascend into an independent divine life. To make Persons — really free beings — necessitates logically a world of all degrees of imperfection: first, the time-and-space conditions; next, the inorganic matter; then, the organic worlds of plant and animal; lastly, the world of human history, — man placed in this garden of Eden in the midst of plants, animals, and inorganic matter. Man, becoming conscious and personal, perceives the infinite contradiction within himself of natural and spiritual; he perceives the war between self-determination or freedom, and determination by outside environment. This is the consciousness of sin and holiness. The ethical and moral laws are all laws of self-activity. A self-active being must act thus and so or else contradict itself, and reduce its productive power to zero. It will, by immoral acts, build walls of Fate about itself. The consciousness of sin is higher than the ethical consciousness. It sees that these walls of Fate, erected by the seven mortal sins, are walls of an Inferno which contain nowhere within them any hope. Not on that road is there any hope of spiritual perfection, but only of bondage and suffering or stupor.

The Orphic Saying regarding "Choice" (No. 13)

reinforces and explains Mr. Alcott's doctrine of Temptation, and is in accord with the Calvinistic restatement of the Oriental principle of Lapse or Fall, but is not in harmony with the doctrine of evolution, which is the esoteric theory implied in the Roman Catholic as opposed to the Greek Christianity.

“Choice,” he says, “implies apostasy. The pure, unfallen soul is above choice. Her life is unbroken, synthetic; she is a law to herself, and finds no lusts in her members warring against the instincts of conscience. Sinners choose; saints act from instinct and intuition: there is no parley of alien forces in their being.”

The conflict lies between a past and a future Paradise. Has man lapsed consciously and wilfully out of perfection? or is he on his way toward a future paradise, through the attainment of three sorts of piety, piety of the intellect, which is the vision of the divine purpose of the world; piety of the will, which is the service of the divine purpose, the sacrifice of all for the promotion of the divine cause; piety of the heart, which loves God, and all mankind as one's greater self?

I shall point out hereafter some places wherein Mr. Alcott seems to adopt Evolution as though it were a part of his scheme. He would seem in one of his insights to propound the lapse-theory as the

necessary presupposition implied by evolution. Here is a world of ascent and progression, rising from the abyss of time and space. It is rising from nonentity towards true being; from the unconscious and passive towards consciousness of reason and towards pure self-activity. It seems to be a return movement and not a primordial activity. How did this condition of imperfection and of separation of the real from its ideal come about?

It marks the profundity of Mr. Alcott's mind that he was wholly possessed with this question. He took the account of genesis as he found it in the theology current in the churches, and took it in good faith and understandingly; Man and Nature — man in nature — are as we find them because there has been a fall or lapse from holiness, on the part of souls existing before the history of things terrestrial. The soul, in its disobedience to God, has fallen itself, and produced a world of finitude and imperfection. In his "Tablets" (p. 189) Mr. Alcott contrasts his own doctrine with that of Jacob Boehme, — who would otherwise be suggested as the teacher, and Alcott as the disciple.

"Boehme, the subtlest thinker on genesis since Moses, conceives that nature fell from its original oneness, by fault of Lucifer, before men rose physically from its ruins; and moreover that his present existence, being the struggle to recover from nature's lapse,

is embarrassed with double difficulties by defecture from rectitude on his part."

This mythological idea of Lucifer's fall was familiar to Puritan New England through Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But Mr. Alcott presents his own view as different and philosophically preferable:

"It needs no Lucifer, other than mankind collectively conspiring, to account for nature's mishaps, or man's; since, assuming man to be nature's ancestor, and nature man's ruins rather, himself were the impediment he seeks to remove; Nature being the child of his choices, corresponding in large — or macrocosmically — to his intents. Eldest of creatures, the progenitor of all below him, personally one and imperishable in essence, if debased forms appear in nature, these are consequent on man's degeneracy prior to their genesis."

He goes on to describe the production of the lower orders:—

"It is only as man lapses out of his integrity, by debasing his essence, that he impairs his original likeness, and drags it into the prone shapes of the animal kingdom, — these being the effigies and vestiges of his individualized and shattered personality. Behold these upstarts of his loins, everywhere the mimics jeering at him saucily, or gayly parodying their fallen lord."

Mr. Alcott repudiates evolution as a first stage. He accepts it, as we shall see, only as a moral

struggle of conscious beings towards purity, and a recovery of lost holiness.

III.—*Mr. Emerson's Appreciation of Mr. Alcott.*

To the student of New England Transcendentalism, it remains a great problem, after reading the whole literature, what it was that Mr. Emerson found in Mr. Alcott's conversations to impress him so deeply. In his biographical notice in the "New American Cyclopædia," Emerson says: —

"Mr. Alcott is an idealist, and we should say Platonist, if it were not doing injustice to give any name implying secondariness to the highly original habit of his salient and intuitive mind. . . . Those persons who are best prepared by their own habit of thought set the highest value on his subtle perception and facile generalization."

Mr. Sanborn has given, in the earlier chapters of this volume, many hitherto unpublished passages from Emerson's journal that show his high estimate of Alcott. It would seem that the close acquaintance began in 1835; and in October of that year Mr. Emerson writes of Alcott: "A wise man; simple, superior to display, and drops the best things as quietly as the least." June 22, 1836, he writes: "Mr. Alcott is a world-builder. Evermore he tries to solve the problem, Whence is the

world?" May 19, 1837: "Yesterday Alcott left me, after three days spent here. . . . I could see plainly that I conversed with the most extraordinary man and the highest genius of the time. . . . Wonderful is his vision. The steadiness and scope of his eye at once rebuke all before it, and we little men creep about ashamed. . . . He never cares for the pleasant side of things, but always Truth and the Origin he seeketh after." Again, in 1848: "He was the one man I had met who could read Plato without surprise." August 7, 1837: "In all these conversations we have glimpses of the universe, perceptions of the soul's omnipotence, but not much to record. . . . I can attain to no register of these far-darting lights and shadows, or any sketch of the mountain landscape which has opened itself to the eye. It would be a valuable piece of literature could a report of these extended and desultory, but occasionally profound, often ornamented, often sprightly and comic dialogues be made. . . . I would rather have a perfect recollection of all this, of all that I have thought and felt, than any book that can now be published." 1866: "Last night, in the conversation, Alcott appeared to great advantage, and I saw again, as often before, his singular superiority. As pure intellect, I have never seen his equal."

Mr. Cabot, in his "Memoir," says that "Mr. Al-

cott visited Concord in 1835, and in 1840 came to live there. Almost from the first he made a prodigious impression upon Emerson." May 19, 1837, Emerson wrote to Margaret Fuller: "Mr. Alcott is the great man. His book ['Conversations on the Gospels'] does him no justice, and I do not like to see it. . . . But he has more of the Godlike than any man I have ever seen, and his presence rebukes and threatens and raises. He is a teacher. . . . If he cannot make intelligent men feel the presence of a superior nature, the worse for them; I can never doubt him." In another letter to Miss Fuller, July 8, 1840 (quoted by Mr. Cabot, p. 405), he says of the "Orphic Sayings": "I think Alcott's paper of great importance to the journal, inasmuch as otherwise, as far as I have read, there is little that might not appear in any other journal." 1852: "It were too much to say that the Platonic world I might have learned to treat as a cloudland, had I not known Alcott, who is a native of that country; yet I will say that he makes it as solid as Massachusetts to me."

In all this it does not quite appear what specially impressed Mr. Emerson in the conversations and Orphic sayings of Mr. Alcott, unless it were the new form of idealism presented. It is certain that Emerson had been all along an idealist, since his early days in the Harvard Divinity School. He

writes to Margaret Fuller, March 14, 1841, as quoted by Mr. Cabot in the "Memoir," p. 478:

"I know but one solution to my nature and relations which I find in remembering the joy with which in my boyhood I caught the first hint of the Berkeleian philosophy, and which I certainly never lost sight of afterwards. . . . I could see that there was a Cause behind every stump and clod, and, by the help of some fine words, could make every old wagon and woodpile and stone-wall oscillate a little and threaten to dance; nay, give me a fair field and the selectmen of Concord, and the Reverend Mr. Pound-me-down himself, began to look unstable and vaporous. This insight is so precious to society that where the least glimmer of it appears, all men should befriend and protect it for its own sake."

I have been obliged to think, as above hinted, that Mr. Emerson attempted to preserve in the last chapter of his book on "Nature," finished August, 1836 ("Memoir," p. 259), a picture of Mr. Alcott as "Orphic poet," by writing out in his own words, and with an effort to reproduce the style of thought, words, and delivery of Mr. Alcott, the idealistic theory which he had heard with such great interest.

"I shall, therefore, conclude this essay with some traditions of man and nature which a certain poet sang to me. . . . 'The foundations of man are not in matter, but in spirit. But the element of spirit is eternity. To

it, therefore, the longest series of events, the oldest chronologies, are young and recent. In the cycle of universal man from whom known individuals proceed, centuries are points, and all history is but the epoch of one degradation.' [This has the sound of the "Orphic Sayings," that appeared in the first number of the "Dial" four years later, but is not like the epigrammatic style of Emerson.] . . . A man is a god in ruins. When men are innocent, life shall be longer, and shall pass into the immortal as gently as we awake from dreams. [Here is Alcott's favorite idea of physical immortality.] . . . Infancy is the perpetual Messiah, which comes into the arms of fallen men, and pleads with them to return to Paradise. Man is the dwarf of himself. . . . [Here follow the passages quoted above, concerning the huge shell of nature that 'once fitted man but now corresponds to him from far and on high'], yet sometimes he starts in his slumber, and wonders [like Swedenborg, for instance] at himself and his house, and muses strangely at the resemblance betwixt him and it."

"Thus," resumes Emerson, "my Orphic poet sang." He closes the chapter and the book with another quotation: "Nature is not fixed, but fluid; Spirit alters, moulds, makes it," etc. This should be compared with the "Orphic Sayings" (32, 35-37, 42), and especially with the "Tablets" (p. 174). "Nature is thought in solution. . . . The flowing world is fashioned in the idealist's vision . . . all

things sliding by imperceptible gradations into their contraries, the Cosmos rising out of the Chaos by its agency. Nothing abides.”¹

But the question arises as to the date when Alcott himself first saw these idealistic visions. It is probable, from his diary, that he received his first intellectual awakening from Coleridge in 1833.

“Christianity had not yet found its philosophical interpretation in my heart. . . . I was looking outward for the origin of the human powers, making more of phenomena than I ought, and studying the concrete

¹ It may be observed, however, that in his Boston lecture on the French *Jardin des Plantes*, delivered perhaps in 1834, Emerson makes this observation, drawn from his Paris journal of 1833-1834: “The universe is a wilder puzzle than ever, as you look along this stark series of once animated forms, — the hazy butterflies, the carved shells, the bird, beast, worm, snake, and fish, and the upheaving principle of life everywhere incipient, in the very rock aping organized forms. Whilst I stood there, I yielded to a singular conviction, that in all these rich groups of natural productions which surrounded me, and in all the vast system which they represented, not a form so grotesque, so savage, so beautiful, but is an expression of some property in man, the observer. I felt that there is an occult relation between the crawling scorpion, the flowering zoophyte, and man.” This passage afterward appeared in “*The Gift*” for 1845 (Carey & Hart: Philadelphia, 1844), which contained also three short poems by Ellery Channing, one by Lowell, and one by C. P. Cranch. — F. B. S. (This probably hints at evolution and not at lapse. — W. T. H.)

without a sense of the grounds for its forms and continuance. Coleridge lifted me out of this difficulty. The perusal of the 'Aids to Reflection,' 'Friend,' and 'Biographia Literaria' at this time (1833) gave my mind a turn towards the spiritual. I was led to seek the deeper ground even of experience, and I found the elements of human consciousness, not in the impressions of external nature, but in the spontaneous life of Spirit itself, independent of Space and Time. I have been steadily pursuing the light thus let in upon me."

He writes in his diary again (Sept. 3, 1835): "Every act of the spirit is prior to, and prophetic of, the acts of the intellect. Every act is originated in the spirit, and assumes a synthetic form. The spirit (especially of a child) is a synthetic faculty."

But the following passage proves beyond a question Mr. Alcott's possession of the style of expression and thought found in the "Orphic Sayings" six years later:—

Dec. 21, 1835. "A true and living philosophy must have its ground and starting-point in the spirit. In this must all things and all beings be involved, and out of it must all be evolved. Thus universal in its scope and particular in its detail must a true philosophy be, explaining the birth, growth, and consummation of each and every part that enters into the grand whole. Spirit in the abstract, spirit in the concrete. . . . these are the true members of the synthesis. How one em-

bodies itself in the other ; taking organs, indicating itself by functions, faculties, laws, — this is the great topic of inquiry, to whose full solution we need the analysis of the whole universe. Visible or organic nature is to be read as the exponent and emblem of the invisible, unembodied spirit. The objective world is to be subsumed into the subjective, and each and every member of it finds its place in the great whole. . . . I set out from the wide ground of spirit. This is — all else is its manifestation. Body is spirit at its circumference, denoting its confines to the external sense [cf. Orphic Saying No. 41]. Body individualizes, defines spirit ; takes the unity into multiplicity, and places under the vision of man parts of the great whole, which standing thus separate can be taken in by the mind, — we are too feeble to apprehend the whole at once, and require that all save an individual thing be excluded from a single view. Infinitude is too wide for man ; he is therefore permitted to take in portions, and he spreads his vision over the wide circumference by little and little.”

In this passage from Alcott's diary, written in 1835, we see the outlines of his philosophy, and also the style in which he must have presented it orally to Emerson in the visits which began in that year. Previous reforms and protests in New England had not reached so far as to change the view of the world. Here was a reform that reached the very root of our thinking itself.

IV. — *Neo-Platonism.*

In the first book of the fifth Ennead, Plotinus discusses the origin of all things, by lapse or fall from the Absolute One. "The Origin of evil," he says in the first chapter, "is audacity, dependence on external sources, primordial difference, and men's hunger for independence or unrestrained liberty to do as they please [selfishness]. Using this unbridled freedom, they separate themselves from their divine origin, and at length become ignorant of their source."¹

According to Plotinus, there are four orders of being: (1) The One; (2) The Intellect; (3) The Soul; (4) Bodies. He exercises himself on the problem of problems; namely, Why does the imperfect arise from the perfect? "How does the intellect perceive?" he says; "what does it perceive, and how did it proceed from The One with this power of perception?" (chap. 6.) "The intellect is the word (*Logos*=internal constitution) and actuality of the One, and the Soul is the word (*Logos*) and actuality of the Intellect" (chap. 6). "The Intellect sees because it is turned back to its origin, the One; its movement is circular" (that is, reflexive, or turned back upon itself, conscious)

¹ Thomas Taylor's translation, the same used by Mr. Alcott and Mr. Emerson.

(chap. 7). "That which is perfect generates, and that which is generated is inferior to its source" (chap. 6). "Everything desires its creator; the highest is the One, and its first-begotten is necessarily present with it, and separated only in so far as it is pure otherness alone" (that is, itself as object, pure self as subject being The One?). He makes the Good and the One synonymous. The Good means the altruistic,—that which gives freely to another,—pure grace. He describes this everywhere as "beyond the intellect and beyond essence" (*τὸ ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας*).

It is as if the Neo-Platonists discovered that the intellect is a return-movement; a process of the resolution of multiplicity into one; the recognition of unity in many objects; that is to say, an act of classifying objects of sense, a subsuming under general terms. Having discovered that the essential action of the intellect is reflexive, they take notice that this proves the secondary and derivative character of the intellect; and accordingly they posit a first term above the Intellect, and call it the One. But the One conceived as that which originates the many which the intellect unites, is an altruistic principle which they call the Good, after Plato. The Good is, then, the primordial One,—perhaps a will power of which the Intellect is the return-movement.

This explanation, if correct, will reconcile Neo-Platonism to the well-established doctrine of Plato and Aristotle ("Sophist;" "The Laws," Book X.; "Metaphysics," XI. 7), wherein the Absolute is identified unmistakably with *νοῦς*, or Reason, and is not placed above reason as an abstract One. The Reason of Plato and Aristotle is a total mind, having will as well as intellect; just as in the Christian conception of God Intellect and Will are one (Aquinas, "Summa contra Gentiles," IV. 19). The intellect presupposes the will; but in God intellect and will are one; or, what is seen is created by seeing it. Now, if these two functions are separated, Plotinus, Proclus, and Jamblichus are warranted in making the will prior, as The Good, the One; and Intellect secondary, as that which reunites what has proceeded from The One. But the Intellect also generates further multiplicity. For there are two orders of knowing (Plotinus, V. Book 6), — self-knowing and the knowing of something different from the self. Self-knowing is the primary or highest act of the Intellect, — that whereby it returns to its source, the One.

The danger, however, of Neo-Platonism is that it will come to deny intellect of its abstract One, and by this deny the Personality of the Absolute. "The One, inasmuch as it is above existence, is

also above intellect; but knowledge is not necessary to it, since it imparts something better than knowledge, namely, the Good. It gives the ability of coming into identity, one with another, so far as possible [the production of social wholes?].” (Ennead V. Book 6.)

In his celebrated chapter on Providence (*πρόνοια*) Plotinus (III. 2) gives us some hints on the ascent out of the abyss of fallen nature. Like Mr. Alcott, he too seems to be inconsistent sometimes and to make Nature a beneficent means of creating souls who are to participate with the Highest, rather than a heap of ruins, the result of the lapse of higher beings out of primitive holiness. He admits that the world always had a being, and consequently that it has always been the care of divine Providence. It is moreover formed according to intellect. “To refer the world to chance is to commit an absurdity” (III. Book 2, chap. 1). “This world was created, not because God reflected that a world ought to be made, but because it is necessary that a secondary nature accompany a primary nature, such as is the Intellect, which, being perfect, cannot be the lowest order of beings [that is, since it is a knowing, it, as subject, must have itself as object; or its nature is to generate within itself a secondary to itself]” (chap. 2). “This world is a beautiful whole, and not evil, unless looked at in a fragmentary mode of

view" (chap. 3). There is, indeed, an illustrious race of divinities and "an army of virtuous souls, and of men made happy by wisdom and virtue," a sort of invisible church, "filling the celestial spaces and moving the stars in their eternal revolutions;" the celestial hierarchies of Dionysius which Dante uses in his "Paradiso" are borrowed from this. "The Good is the cause of the lower animals, and of their mutual destruction" (chap. 4). Even depravity brings something useful to the universe (chap. 5); "for it renders souls vigilant, and causes them to inquire carefully what path must be chosen to avoid evil." "Evil is only a deficiency of good."

In the third Ennead (Book 8) Plotinus even hints at evolution as a possible theory, assumed playfully (*παίζοντες*): "We might say that all beings, not only rational ones but even irrational ones, the plants and even the soil that bears them, aspire to attain conscious knowledge"¹ (*θεωρία*, or speculative insight). Plotinus continues by saying of these aspiring beings: "Some attain to the power of insight (speculative knowing); some only to the imitation of it by forming images of it. Even our playful assumption is prompted by that same aspiration for divine insight." He inquires, what corresponds

¹ Here is Emerson's —

"And striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form."

to this consciousness or insight on the part of minerals and plants, and how Nature, which is said to be void of imagination and reason, possesses self-knowing? Nature (chap. 3) produces her inorganic objects as a sort of object to herself [which she proceeds to behold through the senses of her animals]. Nature is *philotheamona*, or “greedy of beholding herself;” whatever beings arise as inanimate forms have their ultimate cause in self-contemplation; and the self-knowing of the higher beings produces them. Nature does not think, like men and gods, but she dreams (chap. 4), and has only an image of true thought. Thus, too, men who lack the highest powers of thought are prone to rush into action, which is nothing but the shadow of divine insight. Here in Plotinus is the original of those fine poetic sayings reported of Schelling and Oken,—that Reason dreams in the plant, and feels in the animal, and thinks in man. He holds (chap. 7) that the lives of plants and animals are both of them species of cognition, although in different degrees. “Every life is a cognition of some sort,—some more obscure than others, just as one life may be weaker than another; but the higher the order of the being the more it approaches self-consciousness. There are two kinds of souls that descend into the world of matter. The higher order, like so many kings, associating with the governor of all things (Ennead

IV. Book 8, chap. 4), become his colleagues in the general administration of the world. They descend (chap. 5) for the sake of causing the perfection of the universe. The second class of souls descend because they are condemned to suffer punishment." In Emerson's "Uriel" this class is alluded to, —

"Whether doomed to long gyration
In the sea of generation."

The good souls suffer no injury from descent "into the dark receptacle of the body, if they swiftly fly hence; since they gain a knowledge of evil, and unfold dormant powers that would have been otherwise useless endowments." Hence there are positive advantages in such descent when not caused by sin. "By comparison, as it were, with a contrary state, the soul will learn how blessed it is to abide in the intelligible world. It is therefore natural for the soul to deliver itself to inferior, and again to return to superior beings" (IV. 8, chap. 7).

The punishment motive is not sufficient, of course. The higher and truer doctrine is stated by Emerson ("Nature," chap. 6, 2d ed. p. 45): "It is a sufficient account of that appearance we call the world, that God will teach a human mind," taking this so inclusively as to mean that Nature is a process of creating and developing separate individualities. Plotinus, too, comes nearer the philosophic solution when he says in the same book (chap. 6):

“The One cannot be alone by itself; for in that case all things would remain concealed in the One without having form or existence. In the same way, unless souls created lower orders of beings they would not reveal the powers which they possess. The riches of the One would not be realized without souls, and the riches of the souls would not be realized without animals, plants, and minerals; and there would be a sort of ‘barrenness’ in which the prolific energies were arrested through envy or unwillingness [to share one’s being with another]. But it is the nature of an infinite and inexhaustible being to diffuse its beneficence.”

Had Plotinus reasoned, like Plato and Aristotle, that the Absolute One is an absolute Reason, he need not have sought in extraneous motives the ground of the origin of other beings. For the very nature of Reason is to know itself and make an object of itself; the very nature of self-determination is to make itself another to itself. All beings are either self-determined or else they depend on self-determined beings for their origin.

Proclus, in his “Institutes of Theology,” clings closely to the doctrines of Plotinus, though now and then stating something with greater clearness. He suggests Spinoza’s “Ethics,” not only by employing the mathematical form of proposition and proof, in systematic order, but frequently by his very statements. For example, Proposition XIV.

of Proclus states that "Everything is either immovable or moved; and if moved, is moved by itself or through another; it is either self-moved or moved-by-other." Spinoza (Axiom 1) says: "All things are in themselves or in others;" (Axiom 2) "That which cannot be conceived as through another must be conceived as through itself." Proclus identifies the One with the Good (Prop. 13); but the Good is not a self-moved. Great stress is laid on self-relation (*ἐπιστρέφειν*) as the form of the highest order of being; and this is what Hegel's school of philosophy lay so much stress upon, as the doctrine of "return-to-self." It is the form of consciousness, and life, and moral habit; and its image is found in the Cosmos in the shape of orbital movement, diurnal revolution, recurrence of seasons, etc. The external image of this return-to-self-through-other has given the forms of speech in all languages for what is divine, and hence the sun-myth and other astronomical scaffolding of mythologies. "Everything which possesses the form of self-relation (or return-to-self) is incorporeal" (Prop. 15); and on this basis Proclus proves the immateriality of the soul and intellect. "All things," he says (Prop. 34), "proceed from and return to the intellect, and intellect is the object of desire of all things," — repeating the doctrine of Plotinus. But the One is transcendent, and does not proceed or return (40).

Proclus is well called "the Scholastic of the Neo-Platonists" by the historians of philosophy. He collects and systematizes the various insights of his school, and especially of his teacher, Jamblichus, whom Mr. Alcott preferred to the others. It is Jamblichus that Proclus follows in the doctrine of the bound and the boundless (*πέρας* and *ἄπειρον*) which he makes so much of (Prop. 89 *et passim*). This would seem to be the origin of Spinoza's doctrine of substance and its determinations, — "Every determination is negation." "Everything which is primarily being consists of limit and the limitless."

It surprises the student at first to learn that "Providence is an energy prior to the intellect" (Prop. 120), for it would seem to our view that Providence (*πρόνοια*) must be a seeing beforehand that is put to practical use. This paradox is partially removed by a distinction admitted later between human knowing and divine knowing (Prop. 121), the divine knowledge being pronounced occult and unknowable to men, although its form seems to be understood. For it is "a knowing by wholes," and above intellect, as it exists in men. There is knowledge by the senses, of particulars, and a knowledge by the intellect which deals with the causes of existence, — divine knowledge, which knows under the form of eternity. ("Ten Doubts

concerning Providence," § 10. See, also, Boethius, "Consol. Philos.," Book V.) This divine knowledge is further seen to be a knowledge that is creative, or that is in union with the good [intellect and will united? See Prop. 160]. "Divinity, therefore, in knowing himself knows all things . . . he causes things to exist by merely conceiving them to exist, so that by imagining an event to take place he gives external subsistence to his inward images. He gives subsistence to and intellectually contemplates whatever the Universe contains, without turning off his gaze from the spectacle of his own nature." ("Ten Doubts," etc., § 10.)

Proclus states the doctrine of the lapse of souls into time: "Every partial soul is able to descend into generation, and to ascend from generation to real being" (Prop. 206). "Every partial soul must make periods of ascent from and of descent into generation, and this forever and ever." Every soul, moreover, has a perpetual body as its vehicle, which accompanies it in its descent and in its ascent (Props. 207-210). The necessity of the creation of lower orders of beings is found in the very nature of The One, which is the Good. "Goodness is dormant without creation of others" (Proclus, "Commentary on 'The Timæus'"). But creation is at the same time a revelation of the

Creator to himself, as Plotinus also suggests in what is quoted above.

Jamblichus, in his "Life of Pythagoras," says that "Pythagoras was emulous of the Orphic mode of writing." Proclus, in his work on the "Theology of Plato" (Book I. chap. 4), says: "He who desires to signify divine concerns through symbols is orphic, and in short accords with those who write myths concerning the gods." Mr. Alcott probably adopted his title, "Orphic Sayings," from some hint of this kind. He told me in 1859 that he had hoped to get a complete series of sentences, which would carry the appreciative reader through the descent from spirit to matter, and upward again to the first origin. It is probable, therefore, that he intended some sort of order in the arrangement of his one hundred sayings in the "Dial." I will not inquire here further in regard to this, but will quote a few of the most striking of these, in order to see them here in their proper light,—the theories of Plotinus and Proclus, the chieftains of the school of thought to which Mr. Alcott belonged by native genius.

Take the following for the first example: —

"XXXVII. *Sepulture and Resurrection.* — That which is visible is dead; the apparent is the corpse of the real, and undergoes successive sepultures and resurrections. The soul dies out of organs; the tombs

cannot confine her ; she eludes the grasp of decay ; she builds and unseals the sepulchres. Her bodies are fleeting, historical. Whatsoever she sees when awake is death ; when asleep, dream."

In the orders of reality the material world is the last and least substantial, according to Platonism. For it contains the least degree of self-activity, and is moved by external forces. But Mr. Alcott's peculiar form of Platonic idealism makes the soul of man the creator of nature on its descent into oblivion. From this standpoint human history is the obituary of nature : —

"XCVIII. *Obituary*. — Things are memories of ideas ; ideas, the body of laws ; laws, the breath of God. All nature is the sepulchre of the risen soul, life her epitaph, and scripture her obituary."

Since the energy of the soul (or demiurgic mind) has made things, these are its revelation. How it has come to do this is partially explained in the following : —

"XLII. *Order*. — The soul works from centre to periphery, veiling her labors from the ken of the senses. Her works are invisible till she has rounded herself in surface, where she completes her organizations. Appearance, though first to sense, is last in the order of generation : she recoils on herself at the acme of sense, revealing herself in reversed order. Historical is the sequel of genetic life."

Appearance to the senses is the last in the order of genesis, because it has no self-subsisting energy. It (material appearance) is only an image of true being. After the genesis as the inner and essential order comes the historical order as the order of appearance to the senses. (Proclus, "Theol.," Prop. 25.)

"XXXII. *Generation and Corruption.* — The soul decomposes the substances of nature in the reverse order of their composition: read this backward for the natural history of their genesis and growth. Generation and corruption are polar or adverse facts. The tree first dies at the top; to raze the house we first remove the tiling. The decomposition and analysis are from without, according to the order of sense, not of the soul. All investigations of nature must be analytic through the order of decay. Science begins and ends in death; poesy in life; philosophy in organization; art in creation."

According to Mr. Alcott's view, the lower orders of being arise through the lapse from the higher, and hence each lower order has a definite relation to the next higher, and must ascend through it (decomposition, etc., in reverse order). Proclus ("Theol." Prop. 38) has the same doctrine: "All return is through the same things as those through which progression is effected."

"XXXVIII. *Time.* — Organizations are mortal; the seal of death is fixed on them even at birth. The

young Future is nurtured by the Past, yet aspires to a nobler life, and revises in his maturity the traditions and usages of his day, to be supplanted by the sons and daughters whom he begets and ennobles. Time, like fabled Saturn, now generates, and, ere even their sutures be closed, devours his own offspring. Only the children of the soul are immortal; the births of time are premature and perishable."

"The births of time are premature and perishable." The ground for change and decay is given by Plotinus and Proclus, and by all disciples of Plato and Aristotle, as imperfection, — a lack of realization in some essential elements. The existing thing is not all real, but partly potential; hence change occurs to realize the other potentialities. Water is not liquid and vapor and solid at once, but these in succession. Could it be all its potentialities at once (just as soul and mind are), it would not change, but would only be self-identical in all its activity. In Dante's "Paradiso" this thought of Aristotle is given as the explanation of the revolution of the heavens about the Empyrean.

The return of the soul to consciousness out of her lapse into nature is, according to Proclus (as above cited), a perpetual alternation. Mr. Alcott seems to question this view in what he says regarding organization: —

"XL. *Organization*. — Possibly organization is no necessary function or mode of spiritual being. The

time may come, in the endless career of the soul, when the facts of incarnation, birth, death, descent into matter and ascension from it, shall comprise no part of her history ; when she herself shall survey this human life with emotions akin to those of the naturalist, on examining the relics of extinct races of beings ; when mounds, sepulchres, monuments, epitaphs, shall serve but as memoirs of a past state of existence ; a reminiscence of one metempsychosis of her life in time."

But the essential order is not the historical order. The former is the order of dependence of the lower order on its essential causes ; the latter is the order of appearance in time to the senses. Hence Mr. Alcott writes one of his most paradoxical sayings, — one that caused inextinguishable laughter among those who believed in their sensuous experience as the ultimate ground of all certainty :

"XLIII. *Genesis*. — The popular genesis is historical. It is written to sense, not to the soul. Two principles, diverse and alien, interchange the Godhead, and sway the world by turns. God is dual. Spirit is derivative. Identity halts in diversity. Unity is actual merely. The poles of things are not integrated : creation globed and orbéd. Yet in the true genesis nature is globed in the material, souls orbéd in the spiritual firmament. Love globes, wisdom orbs, all things. As magnet the steel, so spirit attracts matter, which trembles to traverse the poles of diversity, and rest in the

bosom of unity. All genesis is of love. Wisdom is her form, beauty her costume."

According to sensuous experience, the order of time is the true order. Hence it seeks in matter the cause of mind. "God is dual" to such a view. Spirit is derivative from matter, and God must be composite of mind and matter. "Identity halts in diversity,"—since true identity (person) has not yet been discovered as the truth of things of sense. And unity is not perceived as the transcendent One, but only as its image in aggregates and collections; for nature's unities are divisible, and not simple, like conscious identity. The poles of opposites (mind and matter) are not integrated by seeing them in their producing causes, and creation is not seen as a whole,—that is, as globed and orbéd.

But in the true genesis which explains the divine causes that transcend the time-order, nature is seen as a consistent whole (globed) whose final cause is the perfection of man; souls are seen as self-conscious, and as recognizing their essence (which is reason) in all things and events. Thus they are seen as "orbéd," or as in a process of return to their true self, which is God. Return (called by Proclus *ἐπιστρέφειν*, and this return, he says) produces a "circular energy" (Proclus, Theol. Prop. 33), for "all things proceed in a circle from causes to causes." This return of the same to the same is

likened to motion in an orbit wherein there is departure and return. Globes are wholes of matter held by attraction, the symbol of love; orbital movement symbolizes the activity of mind which *recognizes* or finds the familiar in the strange, the known in the unknown; hence "Wisdom orbs, but Love globes, all things." Matter hungering to become mind "trembles to traverse the poles of diversity, and come to self-identity" as conscious being. "The desire of all things is to become intellect," says Proclus. This unconscious aspiration is blind attraction, or impulse, in nature. "All genesis is of love" on the part of lower beings; that is, attraction for their higher origin.

In the light of this philosopheme must be understood that on life: —

"XLVI. *Life*. — Life, in its initial state, is synthetic; then feeling, thought, action, are one and indivisible; love is its manifestation. Childhood and woman are samples and instances. But thought disintegrates and breaks this unity of soul; action alone restores it. Action is composition; thought, decomposition. Deeds executed in love are graceful, harmonious, entire; enacted from thought merely, they are awkward, dissonant, incomplete, — a manufacture, not creations, not works of genius."

Life, at its beginning, is not reflective and analytic, but synthetic, and rather a feeling than a

conscious thought. "Thought disintegrates this unity," for it leads to questions and doubts concerning all things. This is to the ultimate end that all may be known through one's own power, and not merely taken as hearsay. Action is synthetic, while thought is analytic; that is to say, action from love is entire, from selfish motives not. This thought is expanded in another saying on action: —

"XX. *Action.* — Action translates death into life, fable into verity, speculation into experience, freeing man from the sorceries of tradition and the torpor of habit. The eternal Scripture is thus expurgated of the falsehoods interpolated into it by the supineness of the ages. Action mediates between conscience and sense; it is the gospel of the understanding."

Action, according to Mr. Alcott, translates death into life. One cannot overcome his surprise at this high estimate of action on the part of a believer in Lapse as the origin of finite things; for one had expected a tendency to quietism in his idealism. Proclus and Plotinus explained discontent as hunger for intellectual vision; and in lack of such vision the soul was fain to make up for it by action. But Mr. Alcott recovers himself and says, in conclusion, that action is only the gospel of the understanding, and that it is only the mediating link between con-

science and sense. The discontent that goads to action is spoken of thus: —

“XI. *Discontent*. — All life is eternal, — there is none other; and all unrest is but the struggle of the soul to reassure herself of her inborn immortality, to recover her lost intuition of the same by reason of her descent amidst the lusts and worship of the idols of flesh and sense. Her discomfort reveals her lapse from innocence, her loss of the divine presence and favor. Fidelity alone shall instaurate the Godhead in her bosom.”

We shall find better things said of this feeling of unrest which afflicts the soul, when we come to review Mr. Alcott’s “Tablets.” Meanwhile the following, on “Aspiration,” treats one phase of this heart-hunger which moves nature: —

“IX. *Aspiration*. — The insatiableness of her desires is an augury of the soul’s eternity. Yearning for satisfaction, yet ever balked of it from temporal things, she still prosecutes her search for it, and her faith remains unshaken amidst constant disappointments. She would breathe life, organize light; her hope is eternal; a never-ending, still-beginning quest of the Godhead in her own bosom; a perpetual effort to actualize her divinity in time. Intact, aspirant, she feels the appulses of both spiritual and material things; she would appropriate the realm she inherits by virtue of her incarnation; infinite appetencies direct all her

members on finite things; her vague strivings and Cyclopean motions confess an aim beyond the confines of transitory natures; she is quivered with heavenly desires; her quarry is above the stars; her arrows are snatched from the armory of heaven."

Mr. Alcott has penetrated the philosophy of education more deeply than other men of his time. Mr. Sanborn has given the evidences of this in foregoing chapters. It is proper to mention here, by way of closing this discussion of Mr. Alcott's "Orphic Sayings," the one on "The Teacher," which presents the loftiest ideal of education to be found in all literature.

"LXXX. *Teacher*. — The true teacher defends his pupils against his own personal influence. He inspires self-trust. He guides their eyes from himself to the spirit that quickens him. He will have no disciples. A noble artist, he has visions of excellence and revelations of beauty which he has neither impersonated in character nor embodied in words. His life and teachings are but studies for yet nobler ideals."

There has always been too much of the spirit of domineering individuality among teachers, — a spirit that strives to efface the budding individuality of the child, and plant in its place a spirit of imitation of the master. The true teacher "will have no disciples." This is the doctrine on which the education of the future must be founded. For

it recognizes that education must be for the sake of developing and preserving true individuality. The great thought that Froebel realized in his kindergarten system is itself a fragment of this higher idea. The preservation of the individuality of the pupil is not an excuse for the development of idiosyncrasy and mere peculiarities, and one-sided tendencies of the pupil. The true teacher directs his pupils to an ideal above and beyond both himself and them.

V. — *Mr. Alcott's Influence in Philosophy.*

Mr. Alcott came to St. Louis many times after my visit to his home in Concord (July 8, 1865, and again in August). He held conversations in circles of his friends in the various States, as he passed through on his way to St. Louis, which was his farthest limit west. His presence was a powerful influence to stir into activity whatever philosophical thought there might be in a place. All people entering upon the stage of the "clearing up," or the intellectual declaration of independence, felt something congenial in the atmosphere of such a conversation as he conducted. The idea of Neo-Platonism is so negative to our civilization that Mr. Alcott could hospitably entertain the thoughts of any come-outer, and offer him, in return, very

surprising views, that flowed naturally enough from the theory of Lapse, but were found altogether "occult" by the modern sense that holds to the doctrines of evolution and progress.

It was perhaps difficult for those who attended the conversations to name any one valuable idea or insight which they had gained there, but they felt harmoniously attracted to free-thinking, and there was a feeling that great stores of insight lay beyond what they had already attained. That a person has within him the power of growth in insight, is the most valuable conviction that he can acquire. Certainly this was the fruit of Mr. Alcott's labors in the West. Ordinarily a person looks upon his own wit as a fixed quantity, and does not try a second time to understand anything found too difficult on the first trial. He set people to reading Emerson and Thoreau. He familiarized them with the names of Plato and Pythagoras as great thinkers whose ideas are valid now and to remain valid throughout the ages. The shallowness of the American is due to the hard-and-fast hold he has upon his knowledge of material or physical ways and means. He is engaged primarily in the conquest of nature for the uses of civilization, and his intellectual energies are so fully occupied with this business that he has not explored the width and depth of the civilization for which he is producing

the wealth. Thus it happens that American thought has for other nations a flavor of Philistinism. It is narrow and shallow. The spiritual heavens are shrunk to the dimensions of a single horizon. There is no intimation that the American Philistine ever heard of any other point of view than his own. He has heard of different manners and customs, but all these are for him utterly irrational and without adequate motives. He believes that his form of democracy is the only form of government fitted for all mankind, and he wonders that all people do not at once adopt it, just as he has done.

Failing to understand contemporary peoples, as the average American consciousness does, it is not surprising that there is a still worse defect in regard to the views of the world formed by the Greeks and Romans, the Persians and the Brahmins. It has been therefore a thing needed that we should have reproduced among us, after a hot-house mode, the ideas of other times and peoples that have performed their part in the long march of civilization. We have to learn the embryology of our civilization, and see the necessity for those stages which have been outworn, and comprehend what was of value, and what is still of value in them. The East Indian literature, the Chinese, the Persian, and especially the Egyptian, all shall be brought near to

us, and our minds endlessly enriched by their lessons. Instead of our little barred window, which lets in a glimmer of light at the top of our cell, we shall then go forth into the free air, and contemplate the entire sky and all its light. We shall then for the first time see the real significance of our own work as founders of a new nation in a new world.

In this most needed struggle for enlargement of view, the leaders of the so-called Transcendentalism of New England will yet come to honor as the pioneers of the Spirit. For the Transcendental movement was a new declaration of independence made in behalf of literature and art and philosophy. Consider what poetry we had before that intellectual awakening, and what we have had since. Scarcely a great name among our poets that has not owed his best, either to a positive impulse from it or to a negative reaction against it. Every one of the chiefs of the Transcendentalists is a source of streams of influence, that have produced and still produce great and good effects in the way of literary art.

Transcendentalism means at bottom the emancipation of the soul from prosaic bondage to the present here and now. There shall be a perspective to our vision both in time and place. We inherit all ages and all countries; let us enter into our heritage. This conviction has been unconsciously

present in our traditions of a liberal education as taught in our colleges. We set the pupil at work on Latin and Greek, in order that he may pick up separately and consciously those threads of his civilization which enter his life unconsciously. For the rights of property, the forms of its conveyance and of its protection from trespass come from Rome, where they were invented for the first time in the history of the race. So all other forms, political and social, whereby the individual can combine peaceably with his fellows, and form social wholes or institutions, — these too come from Rome. The forms of art, philosophy, and science come in the same manner from Greece, and no other people has invented them independently of Greece. Other art exists, it is true ; but it has not the forms of beauty, because it does not express freedom of spirit, but only an ineffectual struggle for such freedom. Art that is founded on Greek art retains this visible manifestation of freedom ; and Christian art, built on it, expresses not only freedom but infinite aspiration. Thus our higher education, following blindly its tradition, has respected this principle of return, — return to the sources of the ideas that are combined in our spiritual life.

But who of this day, in the urban stage of our history, can well form an idea of the poverty in our culture in the rural generation preceding the

Transcendental movement? We had the Hebrew oracles, it is true, and these are the highest of the world; revealing, as they do, a personal, divine-human God, and denying any superessential One above consciousness and personality. But in the superhuman effort of the Hebrew soul to seize and retain this doctrine, it was obliged to let go its hold on all other spiritual ideas and powers. It is negative towards Greek art, fearing its polytheism; negative to Roman political and legal forms, because of their tendency to subordinate spiritual interests to what is secular; negative to science and philosophy, because these conduce to individual self-poise and freedom of thought, to the denial of all authority except reason, and thus to scepticism in religion.

Content with the Hebrew oracles, as its one book for religion and art, law and science, New England Puritanism began its career in a new world, and unfolded one after the other the collisions that were coiled up (so to speak) or latent in it. For the Christian ideal in itself is so transcendental as to demand not only the Hebrew idea of personality in God, but also Greek science to discern the marks of Personal Reason underneath nature; and it reaches this goal finally in Darwinism, which discovers that nature is so made that it does not need a miracle worked upon it from without: for it is inherently

a process of developing spiritual individuality as the fittest that survives, the sole outcome from nature's processes. It needs also Greek art, to celebrate man's conquest over nature, achieved by Greek science applied to the mechanic arts. Man achieves freedom by science and invention, and Greek fine art makes visible, in its statues and temples, the free action of souls to whom matter is utterly plastic, — not a resisting medium, but only a means of adequate expression of human will. It demanded also Roman jurisprudence to announce the laws for the protection of person and property. Puritanism needed all these things, and has admitted them: first, the Roman civil forms and the rights of property; second, the literary and art forms as a result of the Transcendental movement; third, the scientific as a separate process, arising partly within and partly without its institutions of higher education.

So long as the mind is exclusively in the religious stage of culture, it accepts all its dogmas implicitly, and considers them to be above the reach of its intellect. When the Roman church found itself face to face with the Moslem thinkers, who possessed the science of Aristotle, it was forced to defend its dogmas before the tribunal of the intellect, and Scholastic philosophy arose. Similarly Puritanism, while it exercised absolute sway to the

repressal of art, literature, science, and philosophy, never harbored such questions as we have found in Mr. Alcott's "Orphic Sayings." Milton's "Paradise Lost" seemed to restate in a poetic form precisely the world-view delivered to the church by revelation. In its uncompromising hostility to Catholicism, as the religion founded on a corruption of the doctrines of the Bible, it kept itself in almost entire ignorance of those great intellectual structures of Christian theology erected by Saint Anselm, Saint Bernard, Peter the Lombard, Saint Bonaventura, Saint Thomas of Aquino, and the subtle Schoolmen of Saint Victor, — structures of thought symbolized in stone by the cathedrals at Amiens and Cologne, — and it scarcely possessed the tradition of what has been well called the "piety of the intellect." It knew only of the piety of the heart and the piety of the will.

One reads with some wonder in recently published writings of Jonathan Edwards, — the one theologian of New England who had some traces of the piety of the intellect, — the astonishing effect made upon him by the discovery of a fourth-rate compilation of scholastic divinity in his later years. Those Catholic speculations on the great dogmas taught in the creed seemed to Edwards very bold, very ingenious, and very new. Not having heard of the systems of the great Catholic philosophers,

and entirely unacquainted with the writings of those early Christian Fathers who fought out the battles with the heathen and Oriental thinkers during the first four centuries Anno Domini, Edwards mistakes a compend containing the net results of a thousand years of Christian speculation for an original treatise by some recent Catholic!

With Alcott's "Orphic Sayings" came the day of some really radical thinking. Here was a mind serious enough to take up the fundamental questions mooted by Christian thought in its first four centuries and again at its Scholastic revival in the struggle against Arabian pantheism. The contemporaries of Alcott had never dreamed of the possibility of philosophizing on such subjects with the hope of any solution. They consequently never began to think along those lines. And even Jonathan Edwards arrested his intellect, splendidly endowed by native powers for pure thought, in the quagmire of fatalism, and was lost in its Slough of Despond.

No wonder that Alcott came to Emerson with a head bewildered with the new thoughts he was brooding. He could unbosom himself to this one appreciative friend. Here he could discuss the questions lying at the bottom of an intellectual view of the world. How does it come to pass that there is such a thing as incomplete being? Derived being is the paradox of paradoxes. How can

something exist, and yet depend on another for existence? This essential problem is the fundamental basis of human speculation, whether in the form of philosophy or religion or poetry. The Oriental solution of this problem was adopted by Alcott as the true one: it is the solution of the infancy of the race. In the far East it denies the finite and imperfect, and refuses to allow it even so much being as is involved in *seeming* or *appearance*. The world does not exist; it seems to exist only because spirit has lapsed into consciousness; "spirit has eaten of the tree of knowledge." But to the Occident such solution is seen to be inconsistent and unsatisfactory; for it merely transfers the problem from the object to the subject: imperfection seems to exist merely because the *ego* is essentially imperfect.

The solution of the problem of evil, or finitude, takes its final form in the Christian view, which asserts that finitude is incidental to the development of spiritual individuality, and that the Absolute is a conscious Reason, who finds his eternal occupation in multiplying rational beings, and admitting them to the celestial privilege of growth into divine perfection of intellect and will. But this insight gets lost on being put into the form of a dogma, and the very possibility of its comprehension is denied to man. There is no more inter-

esting chapter in the history of thought than the speculation of Gnostic and Neo-Platonist. The struggle to find a connecting link between the empty absolute, which does not create anything nor know even itself, and the Absolute Reason, which knows and creates, led to the exploration of the realm of ideas. All schools of Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism held to the creation of the world by a succession of lapses from the Absolute. The Gnostics taught that that which emanates first from the Pure One is unfallen; but, in contemplating its source, it perceives dualism and departure from perfection, and thus generates a third being, less perfect than itself. This line descends just as we have seen it do in the theology of Plotinus and Proclus, until it reaches the passive, or the material body which cannot create, and hence can descend no further. Although this doctrine of lapse is repugnant to the common-sense of our century, yet it has a tonic value. The transcendency of spirit over matter is given the greatest possible emphasis by it. The eternity of the soul is a sublime doctrine, and one phase of it must always remain true; namely, the eternity of the Divine Soul and of his creative activity. The doctrine of the creation of evil by Lapse celebrates, in colossal and sublime symbols, the doctrine of the freedom and responsibility of human will.

Mr. Alcott claims an eminent place among philosophers, on the ground that he revives and announces, from his own insight, this lapse theory as his view of the world. With him it is not a matter of hearsay and erudition, but of immediate insight. His scholarship discovered the doctrine in the writings of Boehme and Plotinus, perhaps in the meagre quotations from them which he found in Coleridge (read by him in Philadelphia in 1833 or 1834). But those mere hints were sufficient in his mind to make a whole system of thought; and he ranks, in respect to the clearness of his vision, in the line with Plotinus and Jamblichus. Emerson would call him a Platonist, "were it not injustice to his salient and original mind." Alcott's mind from the year 1834 — the year before he came to visit Emerson at Concord — moved in the region of the Transcendental, so-called.

In order to attain a clear apprehension of our surroundings, we must study them at a distance. We must go out of ourselves, and, looking at ourselves from a proper point of observation, learn to know ourselves in just relations. So this age of New England Puritanism needed some sort of self-estrangement to give it the requisite perspective. Thoreau's challenge, addressed to the established forms and usages of civil society, was of this nature. While Thoreau delighted in nature as only

a poet can who sees the morning-red as a revelation of spirit shining through it, and felt his kinship to it, Alcott, with his Gnostic views, saw in nature only the reflection of man's lapse from pristine holiness. In the main he assumed a hostile attitude towards nature; but his doctrine was far more suggestive than Thoreau's to the philosophic thinker. Instead of seeing ourselves arising from nature as its children, let us, with the Gnostics, look on nature as originating in us; as the visibility of our lapse in a former period of existence. Hence came Mr. Alcott's dreadful doctrine of temperaments, — of the blue eyes and blond complexion, and of the dark eyes and swarthy complexion, — imprisonment and release determined upon in a former state of existence. What a strange metamorphosis of Calvinistic foreordination!

In his "Orphic Sayings" Mr. Alcott presented, as we have seen, the Neo-Platonist view of the world, and thus gave to his contemporaries the shock which they needed. This is evident by the uproar of ridicule and indignation which ensued. American common-sense and Fourth-of-July democracy had never considered the possibility of any other view of the world than its own. The wise men of the times did not know that this other view, substantially as announced by Mr. Alcott, was held by the

six hundred millions of Central and Farther Asia, nor that their own Hebrew view had once grown out of that. They did not feel a scientific interest to study the morphology of our civilization. They despised the embryos which had developed into their present life, and, of course, paid the penalty. To one man — the wisest of his generation, however — here was an opportunity not to be neglected. This was Emerson. He alone was able to find great positive results in the study of such a phenomenon as a Neo-Platonist born out of due time, a sort of survival; but he never put away his own view, which was that of evolution, the development theory of the world.

Many, who have supposed from their experience at the conversations of Mr. Alcott that all his utterances were commonplace, and that there was no philosophic system underlying what he said, may be surprised at the fresh statements he made of the Gnostic theory, as shown in the "Orphic Sayings" quoted in this chapter. Their surprise may be still greater when they make a comparative study of these earlier views, in connection with what he wrote in the volumes that he published after 1867.

Emerson, as I have said, adopted the evolutionist theory, and held to it constantly throughout life, as his view of nature, historically considered. But essentially nature was to him, as to the Neo-Plato-

nists and the Gnostics, a lower order of being, not on the same plane of reality as the soul; for such reality as nature possesses is appearance or phenomenality as compared with mind. In this view he could find much sympathy with any and all idealistic views, whether European or Asiatic. Even the unrelenting theory of the Brahmins, which makes all existence an illusion, had its poetic uses for him. His poem entitled "Brahma," published in the first number of the "Atlantic," excited much the same ridicule that the "Orphic Sayings" had caused, nearly twenty years before.

"If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep and pass and turn again.'

This is more paradoxical than anything Alcott wrote. But the poem is a perfect image of the "Bhagavad Gita," in which its every verse and line may be paralleled. Emerson kept this stalwart form of idealism as a sort of medicine which he could produce on occasions when confronted with the Gorgon of materialism in any new shape: What do I care for the iron mills, or the slums of cities, or the cholera, or the Fugitive Slave Law, or some travelling crank, when I can see that all in time and space is only *maya*, or illusion?

It is interesting to note that while Emerson's

poem "Brahma" condenses for us the form and significance of East Indian thought, Mr. Alcott, on the other hand, has also written a brief poem that sums up in a masterly manner the Alexandrian or Greco-Egyptian phase of thought. In eight lines he gives us the summation of the wisdom of Egypt, interpreted as Proclus interprets the inscription of the veiled goddess Neith.

"He omnipresent is ;
All round himself he lies,
Osiris spread abroad,
Upstaring in all eyes :
Nature his globèd thought,
Without him she were not,
Cosmos from Chaos were not spoken,
And God bereft of visible token."

But it is more interesting to note that while Emerson uses the Indian idealism for poetic purposes, himself holding by preference the view of evolution, which is in harmony with European thought, Alcott similarly, from the other side, deviates a little from his Gnostic view of the lapse, and for poetic purposes adopts the view which is more in harmony with evolution. All nature is his "globèd thought," as in the Orphic Saying on "Genesis" (No. 43), and is in the process of changing Chaos into a Cosmos or visible token of God. This visible token is Man.

VI. — *Alcott's Method of Conversation and Literary Style.*

I have already remarked that a conversation of Mr. Alcott was one thing to one person, and quite another thing to a different person. The majority of his audience were people of good understandings and keen enough sense-perception; but of the higher faculty of reason, which deals with wholes (as Proclus describes it), they had only the faintest glimmer. If a person gives himself, year after year, to the contemplation of first principles, and searches eagerly the questions relating to origins, he will sooner or later acquire the vision to see clearly in that realm of presuppositions. While sense perceives what is present before us, the understanding sees objects as means and ends with a view to action, or it discovers relations of dependence between one thing and another, and thereby (through dependence) finds unity and system in the universe. But the Reason looks for the logical presupposition implied in things of sense, or in the relations discovered by the understanding. The presupposition is always what is required to make a whole of the object. For what is dependent demands as its complement that on which it depends; and when this is all inventoried, we have an independent being. This independent being must

necessarily be a self-determined being, while all objects of sense and understanding are in their nature dependent on others for their determination. We can never see self-determination in any of its species — life, feeling, intellect, or will — by sense-perception nor by the understanding, for the simple reason that the self which determines is a transcendental subject of action. The subject which determines itself is, as subject, not yet determined, and thus is not conditioned by time and space; hence its independence. Kant's treatment of this insight, as a paralogism of the pure reason, is sound so far as its statement of this transcendence of all experience is concerned. But it does not follow that our knowledge of the transcendental *ego*, which is always subject, is less valid than our knowledge of objects before the senses, or of causal relations and dependency between those objects. On the contrary, all sense-perception, and all tracing of dependence by the understanding, presuppose the validity of the insight into what is transcendental. If there is no transcendental subject which sees, feels, and wills, then the principle of causality fails us altogether, and with it all the discoveries of relations and influences, actions and reactions, among objects in the world. For the law of causality demands simply a real cause for everything that is changed or modified. The real cause must neces-

sarily be an originator of movement in something else,—it must be able by its own action to influence something different from itself, or else it is no cause.

Kant's insight reveals to him that a sensuous object can never be a true cause, but only a vehicle for the transmission of causal influence. In every case it must receive from something else the whole influence which it transmits to another. If it could add to or modify any of this causal influence, it would at once become a true original cause to that extent. Then his third "antinomy" would fall to the ground. But with this insight Kant ought now to see that all human experience rests on the validity of our knowledge of the reality of the transcendental causality, the transcendental self or *ego*. For to deny the existence of this transcendental cause is to deny all causality; since no object can transmit causality if it does not receive it, and since no objects originate or can originate it. The whole action of the understanding must be arrested, unless it admits the validity of this higher faculty of pure reason, which furnishes the idea of a true, genuine cause, transcending objects and yet influencing them.¹

Mr. Alcott, seated before a company, looked about to see in the faces of those present any

¹ Thus Kant's criticism of the old argument used in proof of a First Cause falls to the ground.

gleams of this transcendental insight, any traces of emancipation from the senses and understanding. Then he cautiously suggested some thoughts which skirted the regions of his theory of genesis. It might be a question of reform; some idea regarding man as responsible for the world which he had made; something on the supremacy of Personality in the universe; something on the temperaments as imprisoning us by their bonds of fate; blue eyes and blond complexion; dark eyes and swarthy complexion; choice as the attribute of personality; the "gifts" by which we measure our ascent from, or descent to, oblivion in the abyss of nature; some remark on immortality, or on pre-existence. Sounding with his plummet in this cautious manner, he delighted to find some person whose aspiration had burned its way out of the first stages of accepting tradition as authority, and who had not become fixed in the dogmatism of doubt. He was pretty sure to arouse some person of the dogmatic sort, in the course of the evening; and the constant problem was how to silence this person before he destroyed the conditions requisite for serene contemplation. For the entire audience might, by an egotist, be so stimulated in their understandings and sensuous experience as to extinguish whatever feeble glimmer they might have of Pure Reason.

Here Mr. Alcott did not always succeed. He never invented a dialectic which could disarm the egotist. Emerson, on the contrary, had a masterly command of this exorcising dialectic, for he knew how to lift himself and all about him out of egotism by an appeal to ethical ideas. Mr. Alcott was not an ethical idealist, like Emerson (who was also an æsthetic or poetic idealist), but rather a theologic idealist. He had in mind the relation of man to the Absolute, rather than the relation of man to man. Hence he kept the focus of his mind always on questions of ascent or descent, to or from the vision of God. But Emerson, by the graces of his manner and by the impersonal air of his inquiry, could dismount his adversary from an egotistic assumption; could always find the joints in his armor, and suggest some consideration that pierced through to the universal conscience throned beyond the shallow egotism and selfishness.

Mr. Alcott's wand stirred up the beasts, but did not allay them. His dialectics proposed to find, in his audience, the premises of doubt and question that had arisen in the scepticism of the community, and to go behind these sceptical premises to the deeper questions of genesis. But Alcott himself radically doubted the popular faith, and even the philosophical basis of it. Hence he could not appeal from the egotism of his opponent to his

ethical philosophy. Now, dialectic is understood by most people as a sort of intellectual tournament, wherein he who can wield the spear of logical proof most deftly is to carry off the honors.

The dogmatists caused Mr. Alcott much trouble by demanding proofs for his assertions. They seemed often to imply, by their manner of asking it in the presence of a transcendentalist, that they supposed the existence of some peculiar weakness of reasoning power in such men. Had they first purged their intellects by the study of Kant's *antinomies*, or better, as Emerson suggests, by the study of Plato's Dialogues, they would have learned that the course of such ratiocination as they were wont to indulge in is only a movement in a circle. One assumes in his premises what he wishes to prove, and then unfolds it as the logical result. The assumptions are one-sided premises, which need correction by their opposites before the debater can be in a state of mind to perceive truth. Argument of this kind Mr. Alcott did not engage in; it is simply egotism when reduced to its lowest terms. Many a sturdy debater fancied himself the brilliant victor because he asked Mr. Alcott a question which the latter declined to answer; the question having assumed premises utterly inadmissible. Those who clamor loudest for proof generally do not know what proof means, and hence

do not recognize real proof when it is shown to them. They do not see that proof is something requiring the active participation of the one to whom it is given. It is not a constraining force from without, but is always ineffectual against stupidity, indolence, bigotry, or self-conceit.

The process of true proof does not have the manner of argumentation; it does not assume the whole result in its premises (which are propositions of reflection), and then proceed to draw them out syllogistically. Speculative truth is never contained analytically in any one, or in all such propositions of reflection (for propositions of reflection are always conversant with sides of opposites, like cause and effect, force and manifestation, identity and difference, essence and phenomenon). Speculative truth is rather the negative of such propositions of reflection, and is transcendent in its procedure. It rises step by step, synthetically, through the negation of what is assumed at the beginning, and inquires for presuppositions until it reaches the first principle, just in the manner Plato describes the dialectic method in his "Republic" (Chapter XIII.), and contrasts it with the method of geometry which "assumes fixed hypotheses and cannot prove them, as the dialectic method does, by carrying them back to a first principle."

The ordinary analytic proof is seen to be shallow after more or less experience of it. The man of insight sees that it is child's play, — a mere placing of the inevitable dogmatism a step or two further back, — that is all. Emerson was perfectly versed in the circular movement of reflection, as one may see in his various essays, where he takes so much pains to inventory the different sides or points of view that belong to his theme. But he did not attempt argument. He once said in my hearing, to a sturdy dogmatist who demanded proof of his statements after he had read his lecture (it was a Dr. Hammer, of St. Louis): "I am sorry if I have been betrayed into saying anything that requires proof."

From this point of view one could call Mr. Alcott a dialectical idealist, notwithstanding his lack of ability to appease the Cerberian dogmatists by material arguments, or charm them like Orpheus by appeals to conscience and to a sense of courtesy. Emerson was another Orpheus. Socrates, too, could charm the dogmatist out of his self-assertion by his urbanity, or else dig for him terrible pitfalls into which he presently tumbled and was heard no more. But Mr. Alcott could draw genial and simple people out of their sensuous and reflective border-lands over into the realm of ideas and the pure reason, by means of conversation. His proofs were to be found in the movement of the minds of the persons

thus drawn. For the reason that he could not deal with the negative phase of the dialectic, like Socrates, I have called him an Aristotelian rather than a Platonist. For Aristotle only inventoried the negative phases, but never sought dialectically to deduce one from another. This is the reason why Aristotle seems to write empirically when speaking of nature, and to write oracularly when treating of mind. This, too, gives the semblance of an oracular method to Mr. Alcott's writings.

Such is indeed the form of all Emerson's Essays, which must be regarded as belonging to the rarest and highest order of books. A book full of argumentative proofs may be easily written, and is soon outgrown and thrown aside. It never really proves anything, but only ties one dogma to another; and this is the reason why the call for proofs is never sated. When one sees a real proof, once for all, he is satisfied, and never asks again for it, a mere reference to it being sufficient. Real proofs are insights into genesis, such as Plotinus and Proclus and Alcott offer us. Emerson's "Over Soul," "Spiritual Laws," and "Experience" are models of real proof, though containing no trace of argument.

In suggesting that Mr. Alcott is a theologic idealist instead of an ethical or æsthetical idealist like Emerson, I have given a clew to his style as a writer. Mr. Emerson always insisted that his (Al-

cott's) style was poor, — "there was no go in it." That there was something tedious even in his conversation, Emerson more than once remarks in his diary as published by Mr. Cabot; and those who talked much with him will remember many oral remarks to the like effect. Mr. Lowell's verdict in the same sense has already been quoted by Mr. Sanborn. No one could possibly be more generous than Mr. Emerson in recognizing the goodness and talents of another; but he was as just as Nemesis herself.

For a long time I was puzzled at this refusal of Mr. Emerson to recognize the greatness of Mr. Alcott's books, especially of "Tablets," published in 1868. For my own part I had found all the great doctrines of Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism there stated with great felicity. I had found that wonderful idea of correspondence between man and his colossal image, built by him as demiurgus: the idea celebrated by the "Orphic poet" in "Nature." It contains also the Swedenborgian idea regarding the correspondence of the two sides of the dualism, spirit and matter. This was given in its germ by Alcott, and wonderfully expanded by Emerson into the best theory of æsthetics extant next after Aristotle's "Poetics" and Hegel's all-including "Æsthetik," in his essay on "Poetry and Imagination" in "Social Aims," as I have already said.

But lately it has come to me that Alcott's style

is not literary because it continually harps on one string, that of genesis. All remarks are made, all reflections initiated, with the doctrine of Lapse in the background; a constant spectacle needed by the reader if he will interpret aright the most trivial of Alcott's utterances. He is a theologic idealist intoxicated with the One, as every good theologian must be. Hence all his utterances have the form of philosophemes, and he has furnished them of the best quality both in prose and poetry. To match anything from Hermes Trismegistus, or Pythagoras, or the Chaldean Oracles, take some of his Orphic Sayings, or, for example, the poetic philosopheme on Man, beginning "He omnipresent is" (as above quoted). Did Angelus Silesius ever produce better sayings than these?

"When thou approachest to the One,
Self from thyself thou first must free,
Thy cloak duplicity cast clean aside,
And in thy Being's being be."

Or,

" 'Take this, my child,' the Father said,
 'This globe I give thy mind for bread ;'
 Eager we seize the proffered store,
 Devour the bait and ask for more."

But this close adherence to the doctrine of Lapse prevents him from commanding a literary style, which must, above all, be free to choose its moods and its vestures. For the artist seeks to incarnate the idea in forms of beauty; while the philosopher

seeks to resurrect the idea and strip off from it all wrappages of imagination. This clinging to one idea prevented his style from having any "go" in it, as Emerson said.

But if we deny him the merit of literary art, we are yet compelled to concede rare philosophical merit. In the days of his earlier conversations, and before he had printed his works, Mr. Alcott used to read, in the course of the evening, from a red-covered book that he carried, certain poems which had this character of philosophemes. They puzzled one at first, resembling in this respect, indeed, the most of Emerson's poems as well as Browning's. But on getting familiar with them, they seemed to be very felicitous in expression, and to have an infinite depth of suggestion, as all true philosophemes should have. It will be remembered that one of the most popular of these was the "Seer's Rations" ("Tablets," p. 39), which —

"Takes sunbeams, spring waters,
Earth's juices, meads' creams,
Bathes in floods of sweet ethers,
Comes baptized from the streams;
Guest of Him, the sweet-lipp'd, —
The Dreamer's quaint dreams.

'Mingles morals idyllic
With Samian fable,
Sage seasoned from cruets,
Of Plutarch's chaste table.

"Pledges Zeus, Zoroaster,
Tastes Cana's glad cheer ;
Suns, globes, on his trencher,
The elements there.

"Bowls of sunrise for breakfast,
Brimful of the East ;
Foaming flagons of frolic
His evening's gay feast.

"Sov'reign solids of nature,
Solar seeds of the sphere,
Olympian viand
Surprising as rare.

"Thus baiting his genius,
His wonderful word
Brings poets and sibyls
To sup at his board.

"Feeds thus and thus fares he,
Speeds thus and thus cares he,
Thus faces and graces
Life's long euthanasies.

"His gifts unabated,
Transfigured, translated, —
The idealist prudent,
Saint, poet, priest, student,
Philosopher, he."

VII. — *Mr. Alcott's Two Epochs as Seer.*

In all my acquaintance with Mr. Alcott, beginning in 1857 at New Haven, and, after the interval of our Civil War, taken up again in 1865, and

continuing a close relation until his death in 1887, I never saw him at his best in a conversation, — never as Emerson describes him, and as he appears in the “Orphic Sayings” and in the ideal crayon picture of him given in this book; namely, as a person wrapped in a vision, with a somewhat stern and oracular countenance pouring forth his mystic sayings and rebuking the present time for its wretched conventionalities, — speaking as one having authority. In the days of his first inspiration, and before he had broken himself against the old order of things, he had the air of a lofty censor of the age and its institutions with whom no compromise is possible. He reminded one most of all of a Hebrew prophet; and no doubt this ideal was unconsciously drawn in from his early Hebrew training, which he and all others of New England birth and education imbibed. That is one of the greatest of all educative elements in the character of Protestants, and especially of Anglo-Saxon Protestants. The ideal of a strong, serious-minded, independent manhood, unswerved by personal interest, thoroughly patriotic and devoted to the public interest, it draws its support from a sense of righteousness that gives it a backbone coterminous with the axis on which the universe revolves. So long as this character is recognized and respected, and has in the main

the support of the community, small and great, it stands firm like an oak, and thrives on the hostility of the elements in the society that it opposes.

Now, let this sort of character lose its hold on the moral support of the community; let it be driven like Dante into exile; let it be condemned to the scaffold like John Brown; let it be mobbed like Garrison, or shut out of pulpits like Theodore Parker, or boycotted as Mr. Alcott was,—and the man becomes a tragic character to a greater or less degree according to his reaction and inward power of support.

This species of character, modelled on the Hebrew prophet, it should be said is far more likely to be an inward tragedy than a genuine historical one. The average man puts on the air of a censor of his age or his community, and develops an overweening egotism; or he poses as an unappreciated genius for poetry, or philosophy, or philanthropy, or statesmanship, or theology, or ethical purity of character.

The pathway of history for eighteen centuries is strewn with wrecked individualities of men who have become fanatics or cranks through the demoniac possession of a single idea, and the self-delusion—a suggestion of the evil one—that they are exceptionally wise and gifted above their

fellow-men; that they, in short, are right and the world all wrong.

This is the penalty we pay for this most sublime element in our education, the Hebrew thread of our civilization; more important indeed than the two other threads, — the Greek one of fine art, literature, and science; the Roman one of jurisprudence and civil government. For it is the supreme doctrine of personality, that believes in a personal God and worships him by becoming a person as nearly like him as possible. The person must, before all, have character; he must act on principle, and be thus an image of eternity amid the fluctuating elements of time; he must therefore be self-sacrificing for a cause, the cause of the social whole. Character must grow in the direction of a special Providence that watches over the weal of others; character must forever grow in intellect and will and in love for mankind; but its danger lies in its over-reliance on its own wisdom. The Great Teacher gave the one prescription to ward off the fatal disease that attacks this Hebrew individualism, and that prescription is humility and self-abasement. Its intellectual rule is the measure by service of one's fellows: be their servant if you would rule over them.

But we have from this ideal the most important fruition of all human history; namely, the

development of individualism, and the formation of a set of institutions to nurture it,—such, for example, as a national constitution based on the idea of local self-government, and a system of free common schools, a voluntary church and perfect freedom of worship, free competition in all branches of productive industry, facilities for travel and adventure on the border-lands of the world; protecting property and encouraging its acquirement in all forms, whether real estate or personal, whether consisting of goods and chattels or of incorporeal rights and franchises. We — that is, we Anglo-Saxons of Great Britain and America — have more positions of directive power open for the individuals of all ranks and conditions in society than any other people that ever lived, and our possibilities are doubling and quadrupling from generation to generation. The large business houses of New York, Boston, and Chicago demand as much directive power as is required in a small kingdom; a constant survey of the world must be kept up. The management of railroad systems, of banking concerns, of colossal manufacturing establishments, of mines, of educational institutions, of scientific enterprises and explorations, — all these and the long category of similar opportunities remind us of the increasing demand there is on the individual to develop his directive power. .

Such reflections as these must needs be present in our minds when we study the biography and writings of such an exceptional man as Mr. Alcott.

His later career was unlike his beginnings in many respects. He changed his views as regards the practical reform of the world after his final experiment at Fruitlands. The family was the institution which effected his conversion. He came to see that his socialism was destructive to the family, and for no good purpose higher or more sacred than the family. Fourierism and all other forms of socialism are reversions to an earlier type of human development. After the tribe, which is an enlargement of the family as the fundamental human institution nearest to nature, there comes the village community. This is replaced by the higher stage of feudalism, serfdom, and the manor. Then come free industrial competition, free suffrage, and representative government. The first reaction against the disaster of the Fruitlands scheme found Mr. Alcott ready to become a martyr and starve for his idea. He tells us that it was the sight of his family that made him question his right to practise the stern individualism which I have above described as modelled on that of the Hebrew prophets.

If he had a right to starve himself, he had no

right to allow his family to starve. Thus his inward conviction as to the righteousness of his cause received a shock. There must be something wrong about it; he could not tell what it was. But here he must draw a line,—he had no right to go any further with his Hebrew individualism.

The Hebrew idea is so abstract and transcendental that it dissolves all institutions without exception. The prophet must cling to the cause of Jehovah, the absolute Person, though he be obliged to be a traitor to his nation, to his family, and to civil society.

Having begun to limit his individuality from within, of course Mr. Alcott became a different man by degrees. The early stage was the fiery-eyed prophet epoch which Emerson saw and has described. The second epoch was a growing compromise with things as they are, and a gradual enlightenment as to the validity of another world-principle than that of the Lapse of the Soul. This caused him within the last twenty years of his life to speak appreciatively of the Christian Church, and to claim the substantial identity of his own view with that held by Christianity.

The negative or one-sided elements of individualism in Mr. Alcott's career as prophet—what I should call the fanatical elements of it—were:

(1) His vegetarian notions, derived perhaps from Jamblichus's "Life of Pythagoras," and from Porphyry's treatise on abstention from animal food. (2) His doctrine of the temperaments, derived from Jacob Boehme, who describes man's soul as "lapsing out of her innocence, and entering into a strange inn or lodging wherein she is held sometime captive as in a dungeon, wherein are four chambers or stories, in one of which she is fated to remain, though not without instincts of the upper wards (if her place be the lowest), and hope of finding the keys by which she may ascend into these also." These chambers are the four temperaments or complexions: (*a*) melancholic or earthy; (*b*) phlegmatic or aqueous; (*c*) choleric or fiery; (*d*) sanguine or ethereal.¹ (3) His doctrine of the actual inspiration of the infant child as being newly descended on the planet, and full of shadowy recollections of its pre-existent heavenly life. This literal interpretation of Wordsworth's Platonic Ode, "Intimations of Immortality," led at any time to impractical attempts in the education of children. Nevertheless, he combined with what was fanatical in his educational views other views of the truest and most lofty character. His Orphic Saying on "The Teacher" I have already

¹ See the quotation in "Tablets" (page 196) for the unfolding of this doctrine.

mentioned as the most advanced educational ideal. His reforms in school-desks, blackboards, the adornment of the school-room with works of art; his mild discipline based on courtesy and urbanity; his use of allegory and symbolism to develop spiritual perception; his theory of the aid to be gained from fiction in the development of the mind,—these and like things make his educational experiments far more important and instructive than those of Pestalozzi, in all respects except the one that honors the Swiss educational reformer most; namely, his idea of the education of the masses, and the use of education as the great social cure-all for the democratic civilization just then on its advent.

My observation of Mr. Alcott's career, as I have said, belongs to the second epoch of his life, when he had admitted within his own mind a conviction that his theory had some sort of limit which prevented it from being unconditionally true. He could not define this limit, but he felt that it existed; and this feeling humiliated him somehow in his soul, and gave him an air of compromise in his dealings with practical life that he did not have in his first epoch.

But he could not see that his first principle was at fault. Over and over again he questioned it, and always returned with the conviction unshaken

that the Lapse of the Soul is the origin of all finite things, including the solid planet on which we walk, the men and women we meet, our entire environment of things and events. The pre-existence of the soul was as certain to him as the present existence.

From 1865, the time of my first visit to Mr. Alcott at his home in Concord, and on through all his visits to St. Louis, and the time of my intimacy with him in the days of the Concord School of Philosophy, and of my residence in the town near him, I had kept before him always my notion of the inadequacy of the gnostic world-view. "If nature," said I, "is caused by the lapse of the soul from innocence, you cannot logically connect with it any return or ascent; such ascent is entirely unexplained by any of the Neo-Platonists. The difficulty lies in the theory of descent from the absolute. You must conceive the Absolute as making a reflection of himself in time and space, — a 'mutable image of immutable Being' is what Plotinus would call it. But in order to be an image of the Absolute, it must exhibit only evolution, — a progressive vanishing of the realm of God's not-me, as Rothe calls it in his 'Theological Ethics.' In evolution all is positive; even the evil or finitude gets all its reality from the positive struggle of the good to manifest itself and ar-

rive at pure self-determination or divine freedom. You can always say of evil: This would be pure nonentity were it not that God is lifting it by progressive stages into a reflection of his divine personality."

To all this Mr. Alcott would reiterate his theory that the first objects created by Divinity must be most like him, and therefore pure, unlapsd souls. These having infinite freedom of choice, it is possible for them to choose separation from the divine; and that some have done this is evident from the fact that we find ourselves here.

I objected to this doctrine of pre-existence: If it was infinite pre-existence, as the Platonic doctrine of immortality held (on the fallacious ground that what begins must end, and the nature of mind being found by philosophy to be necessarily immortal, it is evident that it never began to be), — to this eternal pre-existence I urged that then there are, as Proclus also inferred, an infinite number of gods. To escape the consequences of this, Proclus posited an abstract One, as we have seen, above souls and intellects and existences of all kinds. If, on the other hand, it be admitted that souls were created in a premundane state of existence, then the ground for the world-theory of Neo-Platonism is given up. For then it follows that an immortal being can begin to be, and it

follows that a soul can have an immature state of being; and if so, then why is not nature precisely this cradle or nursery of newly born spirits continually created by God?

If pressed by these arguments for the evolutionary standpoint, he at first courteously but firmly repeated his doctrine of the emanation of perfect souls as the beginning of creation. If at last he became impatient, he said or exclaimed, "I never can believe that I originated in that matter out there!"

Although Mr. Emerson could not admit that the writings of Alcott were equal to his conversation, I have the impression that the words actually uttered in speech are the same that are found in his writings ("Orphic Sayings" and "Tablets"). The impassioned manner, the high disdain, the air of divine sorrow and reproof, the fiery flashing of the eye, the earnestness of the seer,—all these effected what types and ink cannot convey again.

Mrs. Alcott, it is said by Mrs. Cheney in her biography of the author of "Little Women," was the one who induced Mr. Alcott to make several attempts to set down his views in writing; this was somewhere in the time of the Civil War. For when I visited him in 1865 he had already completed many pieces of what he afterwards collected and published in 1868 as "Tablets." He

read them to me, and I listened as critically as I was able. After a while I began to discover now and then a passage that implied the view of evolution, and pointed it out to him. I tried to convince him that the theory of pre-existence is only a mythic form of stating what if logically stated is merely the hierarchy or order of degrees of substantiality of the different forms of existence. Even in his "Orphic Sayings" he had discriminated the historic order from the order of genesis; for "genesis" I would substitute the word "perfection," or "totality," or "independent subsistence." In the order of independent subsistence or completeness of existence, the highest souls come first. (For example, Goethe at the age of eighty was more of an independent individual, more of a person, to use Mr. Alcott's word for it, than when first born.) But I do not think that Mr. Alcott modified anything because of my criticism. He had already published some of the essays in the "Boston Commonwealth" when first edited by Mr. Sanborn. These were classified by him as "practical." The ones read to me were "speculative;" and he gave a number of them to me to print when I began my "Journal of Speculative Philosophy" (they appeared in vols. 1 and 2, also in vols. 7, 9, and 15).

Considering the fact that Mr. Alcott retained

his original philosophical principle during all his life, we must study his attempts to adjust it to doctrines of evolution with this always in view. What explanation he could give of his world must be regarded as a sincere endeavor to adjust the facts to his theory of Lapse.

VIII. — *The Tablets: Mr. Alcott's Psychology.*

In his book "Tablets," which I have stated was published in 1868, after some portions of it had appeared in Mr. Sanborn's paper and in my Journal, more than three fourths of the matter, making seven chapters, is ranked under the general rubric "Practical" (Book I.). There are: I. The Garden; II. Recreations; III. Fellowship; IV. Friendship; V. Culture; VI. Books; VII. Counsels.

His second part (less than one fourth of the whole) is called "Speculative" (Book II.), and includes four chapters: I. Instrumentalities; II. Mind; III. Genesis; IV. Metamorphoses.

Each of these chapters is subdivided into sections treating of special topics that fall under its general subject.

"The Garden," placed at the entrance of the book, suggests intentionally the paradisaical one which is both the past and future goal of humanity. As we enter it, an atmosphere of idyllic simplicity seems to pervade all, and it warns us of

the immense distance we have suddenly been transported from the noisy din of a life in the iron-mills and thoroughfares of productive industry. It seems a book written for an infinite leisure. Wealth and luxury have arrived, and there is no more hurrying from the boarding-place to the workshop or the counting-room in the strife to earn one's daily bread. We have a competence, and now we wish to live rationally and humanly,—which means, if one will, æsthetically and poetically. The boarding-house and hotel give place, therefore, to the home; and its symbol, the Garden, has opened its gate for our admittance.

The curse of Eden, “By the sweat of thy brow,” etc., has long since been forgotten. Mr. Alcott, who conducts us about his premises, discourses to us of famous gardens, such as those of Eden, the Hesperides, Alcinous, the Orchard of Academus, and shows us how his theory of man as Demiurgus comes in to explain it all.

“Gardens and orchards plant themselves by sympathy about our dwellings, as if their seeds were preserved in us by inheritance. They distinguish Man properly from the forester and the hunter. The country, as discriminated from the woods, is of man's creation. The Savage has no country. Nor are farms and shops, trade, cities, but civilization in passing and formation. Civilization begins with persons, ideas; the garden and orchard

showing the place of their occupants in the scale ; these dotting the earth with symbols of civility wherever they ornament its face. Thus by mingling his mind with nature, and so transforming the landscape into his essence, Man generates the homestead, and opens a country to civilization and the arts."

His remarks on ornaments in the garden will recall to mind what the visitor has seen at Concord in former days when Emerson's summer-house or Mr. Alcott's rustic fence was still standing.

"Arbors are especially ornamental. No country residence is furnished without the embellishment of a summer-house. It may be constructed of the simplest stuff grown near at hand in the woods. For one shall not range far in that direction without soon falling upon every curve in the geometry of beauty, as if Nature designing to surprise him anticipated his coming, and had grown his materials in the underwood, along the lines especially of fence-rows, where young pines bent by the lopping of the axe, snow-falls, or other accident, in seeking to recover their rectitude describe every graceful form of curve or spiral suited to his rustic works. These may be combined in ways wonderfully varied ; and the pleasure attending the working them into a shapely whole has charms akin to the composing of poems and pictures. There is a delight, too, in surprising these stags of the woods in their coverts, of which only artists can speak."

It is hard to understand how any one can live in a town in New England and keep out of his prose or verse any allusion to the great revolution there going on year by year, which will result in making the entire population a manufacturing people. The influx of foreigners, and especially of Canadian French, into the "factory villages," destroys gradually but irresistibly the old type of New England civilization. The small farmers are on the decrease, manufacturing corporations swallowing up and centralizing the ownership of the landed property. The foreigner is found more easily managed and cheaper than the native born; and hence the former is employed in the mills, while the latter leaves his birthplace for the distant West, and mingles his individuality with the motley throng he finds there. We have no better evidence afforded us of the decrease and removal of New England than the fact that its spirit has become a theme for art. Hawthorne, Longfellow, Holmes, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Howells, and others find themselves far removed enough from it to distinguish it clearly in outline, to idealize and portray it. In Mr. Alcott's "Tablets" it is the complete and persistent ignoring of the decline in home productions and increase of imported agricultural staples that gives the book such an antique air.

If, as Thoreau tells us, the bodily wants, when reduced to the lowest terms, may be gratified at something less than thirty dollars a year, what is it that we gain by wasting our surplus energies on the body? Are we really doing a thing of so much more importance that it warrants us to throw aside the book of Thoreau or Alcott with a business air, and flatter ourselves that we are above such idling?

Reflections like these are in Mr. Alcott's mind when, after quoting a few pictures from the poets, he closes the subject of the Garden: —

“Do we ask, on viewing the rural pictures which the pastoral poets afford us, Whither is our modern civilization tending? What solid profits has it gained on the state of things they describe, seeing the primitive virtues and customs, once enjoyed by our ancestors, are fading, — the generosity, the cheer, the patriotism, the piety, the republican simplicity and heartiness of those times? Machinery is fast displacing the poetry of farm and fireside; the sickle, the distaff, the chimney-piece, the family institution, being superseded by prose powers; and with their sways have come slavery, pusillanimity, dishonor. I know there are reconciling compensations for all risks of revolution. For while the Demos thus takes his inch, Divinity secures his ell; so the garment of mankind comes the fuller from the loom in this transfer of labors. The fig-leaf thus cunningly woven

costs fair honors, nevertheless, and we covet in our hearts the florid simplicity of times of sturdier virtues and unassailable integrity."

We leave the Garden and pass on through the chapters on "Recreation," whose psychological effect is vividly portrayed in the little poem already given on page 387. Mr. Alcott once gave me the biographical incident which furnishes the key to this poem. His long brooding over the problems of philosophy, neglecting food and sleep, brought on something like a temporary fit of derangement, and he rushed out of the house to escape from the spectres that haunted him. The fresh air and exercise restored him; and as he returned his children met him and led him over his threshold.

"Nature is wholesome. Without new elixirs daily taken we perish of lassitude and inanity. The fountains must be stirred to their depths and their torrents sent bounding along their sluices, else we sink presently into the pool of inertia, victims of indecision and slaves of fate. Every pulse pushes nature's quaternion along life's currents, recreating us afresh; the morn feeding the morn, Memnon's music issuing from every stop, as if the Orient itself had sung."

"Nature's quaternion" is one of many examples of Mr. Alcott's taste for sonorous expressions which he hunted up among old English writers,

much in the same manner as he "surprised the stags of the wood" in order to secure bent limbs with which to construct his rustic fence and Mr. Emerson's summer-house. This word "quaternion" is borrowed from Milton, who uses it to denote the four elements of nature, — earth, air, fire, and water.

"Fellowship," treating of the topics of hospitality and conversation, is followed by "Friendship," which traces its mystic meaning to the pursuit of the all-beautiful, portrayed happily in the poem headed "The Chase." In order to understand this mystic poem one must read the eighth book of the first Ennead of Plotinus, and see how the soul reaches the absolute Mind through its "Chase" of the beautiful in bodily forms: —

"Ideas sole imparadise the mind ;
Through parting gates of human kind
Enter thou blest the Unseen Mind."

In the poem of "The Goblet" he celebrates the family: —

"I drank delights from every cup ;
Arts, institutions, I drank up ;
Athirst, I quaffed life's flowing bowls,
And sipped the flavors of all souls.
A sparkling cup remained to me, —
The brimming fount of family."

The chapter on "Culture" brings us to the discussion of teaching and the Socratic dialectic.

Pythagoras is presented as the model teacher, and his discipline is fully described in a passage borrowed from Mr. Alcott's favorite book, Jamblichus's "Life of Pythagoras."

The uses and abuses of books are shown in a few paragraphs, among the pithiest in the book. Works without ideas or imagination, but filled only with the barren products of uninspired brains, — why read these when there is a fountain of fresh inspiration always accessible?

"Why nibbling always where
Ye nothing fresh can find
Upon these rocks?

"Lo, meadows green and fair!
Come pasture here your mind,
Ye bleating flocks."

With a chapter on "Counsels" Mr. Alcott closes the practical part of the book. A remark on individualism shows his reflections on the wisdom or unwisdom of his own career of protest against public opinion.

"Nor is any man greatest standing apart in his individualism; his strength and dignity come by sympathy with the aims of the best men of the community of which he is a member. Yet whoever seeks the crowd craving popularity for propping repute forfeits his claim to reverence, and expires in the incense he inhales."

The speculative portion of this work has caused much perplexity, for the reason that it requires a peculiar alertness on the part of the reader in the art of reading between the lines, since more lies in the connection which seemingly detached passages have than in the direct sense of the words and sentences. Just as Goethe in his "Faust," or Tennyson in his "Maud," or Browning in so many of his poems portrays a dramatic action by letting the reader see a reflection of the act in the mind of the personage who speaks; so, too, philosophy of the highest order of insight may be portrayed by giving here and there a bold stroke, and letting the thoughtful student supply the full outline which belongs to it. Winkelmann's remarks upon the "Torso of the Belvedere" illustrate how completely this may be done. But it is this habit that gives the mystic character to Mr. Alcott's writings, — the literal sense only being seized by the reader, and the far-off implied meaning either entirely missed or but faintly surmised.

Stating compendiously the contents of the speculative part of the book, they are:—

1. *Instrumentalities*. — The world of nature and man regarded as means to the highest end.

2. *Mind*. — The end itself regarded as culminating in person.

3. *Genesis*. — How the world of nature and man is in all its stages a descent from and a process towards that end.

4. *Metamorphoses*. — The unconscious phases of life, regarded as showing a substantial unity with that end.

If Mr. Alcott seemed a little hostile to the prevailing spirit of the age when he conducted us through his Garden, in the opening of the speculative part of the book at least he does full justice to it. We have at the commencement a statement in its broadest significance of the "tendency" to make and invent useful things. Mechanic invention is seen as the instrument by which combination is effected and the weak made equal to the strong. Intelligence gets diffused and riches become instrumental in the service of the humanities.

"Our time," he says, "is revolutionary. . . . All things are undergoing reform and reconstruction, the fellowship of all souls intent on laying broad and deep the foundations of the new institutions." Here is indicated a sympathy with what is called the spirit of progress, which is a more or less outspoken belief in evolution. His optimism carries him so far in this chapter as to make him speak hopefully of "nations leagued together on the basis of mutual assistance," and of trade and com-

merce, which he describes as "the natural knot tying the nations together by the coarser wants only." He speaks of "power stealing from the few to the many with speed unprecedented;" of "middle men taking the lead, with human sympathies and broad common-sense; presidents and kings paying loyal homage to them." Finally he gets so far away from that pessimistic view of existing institutions which colored the "Orphic Sayings," that he even thinks that "Reason is fast becoming republicanized, and from being the exclusive property of the few is diffusing itself universally as the common possession of the multitude." To understand this optimism, which looks not only for the possession of philosophical insight by all men, but also for the "reappearance in public life of the old virtues of reverence for man and fidelity to principle, so venerable and sacred in private stations," we must remember that this was written at the close of our Civil War, when emancipation had become a fixed fact through a miraculous uprising of the people. Those who had mobbed Garrison in Boston, and had imprisoned fugitive slaves in the State House had a dozen years later effected the abolition of slavery, — this was the miracle. By an act of Providence the stone of offence was removed, and the occupation of reformer was gone. Mr. Alcott goes on to notice

the increase of thought and learning: "Knowledge everywhere diffused is accessible to all." He sees the uses of wealth: "Capitalists holding kings and presidents in check while playing the better game of civilization." Sectarianism is departing, and Christian sympathy is extended even to the criminal, so far as to seek the means of his cure as well as his punishment.

Turning from this pleasant contemplation of the regeneration of the world and the return of the reign of Saturn, —

"Jam reddit virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna," —

he inquires into the method which has made these instrumentalities possible. "Without symbols people perish; things must be exalted into some fair image of the mind. . . . Ideas supplement and symbolize facts." He well states the present and future victories over nature by "mechanical invention in the service of soul as of sense. Having recovered the omnipotence in nature [by the steam-engine and its children], the omnipresence [by the progeny of the electric battery], thought is pushing its inquiries into the hitherto unexplored regions of man's personality, for whose survey and service every modern instrumentality lends the outfit and means . . . the book of creation illustrated anew and posted to date."

But this method is not materialism, for he (the materialist) "inverts the creative order, and thus hangs the world's picture as a man with his heels upwards." He assumes "force as the father of thought; he confounds faculties with organs, life with brute substance." The ideal naturalist proceeds differently: "Opening at spirit, and thence proceeding to ideas, he finds their types in matter; life unfolds itself naturally in organs, faculties begetting forces, mind moulding things substantially . . . connections and interdependencies appear in series and degrees . . . man leading forth the animated creation from the chaos,—Adam naming his mates; himself their ancestor, contemporary, and survivor."

There seems to have been an attempt on Mr. Alcott's part, in this section on "Method," to reach an idealism that would explain and justify the optimism of the previous section, wherein the doctrine of progress is indicated; but his attempt, we see, is not successful. He comes back to the lapse theory. Accordingly, in the third section he says:—

"Man is a soul informed by divine ideas and bodying forth their image. His mind is the limit and measure of things visible and invisible. In him stir the creatures potentially, and through his personal volitions are conceived and brought forth in matter whatsoever

he sees, touches, and treads under foot, the planet [which] he spins."

Man, as an instrument, is self-end; hence he is the instrument of the creation, the "Demiurgus." He is the microcosm, and reaches from the centre to the circumference. "A theometer, instrument of instruments," — for man's highest end is to realize in himself the divine; he is a measure of the divine in all things, and detects and recognizes it.

Having thus treated of the means, we come to the end or purpose, which is Mind. This he treats under four topics: Ideas; The Gifts; Person; Choice. Ideas are the constants in the fleeting show of time. We seize the general and abiding, while the special comes and goes.

He suggests a good interpretation of the myth of Ixion, who embraced a cloud: "He is the visionary, mistaking images for ideas, and thus paying the cost in his downfall . . . the man of sense [as opposed to the man of true ideas] is the visionary, fancying things as permanencies and thoughts as fleeting phantoms."

"What are The Gifts?" I have often asked myself on arriving at this obscure chapter. Are they the talents which measure the escape from "the abyss"? If so, the rudimentary form is instinct, — mere organic unity; then comes sense, and after

it memory, and thus on through understanding, fancy, reason, imagination, conscience, and finally culminating in the will. In this we should have a scale of ascent from the lowest to the highest and most complete form of self-determination. The ascent to Person through the hierarchy of gifts, says Mr. Alcott, is a slow process: "Long for the individual, longeval for the race. Centuries, millienniads elapse, mind meanwhile travailing with man, the birth arrested for the most part or premature, the translation from germ to genius being supernatural, thought hardly delivered from the spine and occiput into face and forehead, the mind uplifted and crowned in personality." According to this we should really seem to have in Mr. Alcott's own form an evolution of man from nature; nature would be the birth of personality, — universal mind "travailing with man." Man would be the end and purpose of nature, and not its cause individually, but only as identical with universal mind. Man's essence would be the cause of time and space, and the individual man would be the final outcome.

The gifts are named by him ("Tablets," p. 179) in descending order with the beings to which they give their specific character, thus: —

Will — the Person ;	Imagination — the Idea ;
Conscience — the Right ;	Reason — the Truth ;

Fancy — the Image ; Memory — the Event ;
Understanding — the Fact ; Sense — the Thing ;
 Instinct — the Life.

It will be remembered that this series of categories was mentioned as one of his original discoveries, and inventoried in his "spiritual real estate." There is a slight difference between these lists, as will be seen by comparison. The one of 1859 read:—

Spirit — God ;	Fancy — Shapes ;
Will — Laws ;	Understanding — Things ;
Love — Persons ;	Memory — Tradition ;
(Conscience — Right ;)	Instinct — Embryons ;
(Imagination — Ideas ;)	Life — Monads ;
(Reason — Truth ;)	Body — Atoms ;
Nature — Matter.	

(I have placed in parentheses the unchanged couplets.)

In this list he follows Plotinus in discriminating matter from body, and in making it correspond to the general term of *nature* instead of body. So, too, life is made a general term covering the whole series of souls.

Later, on printing his book, I think Mr. Alcott saw that it confused his readers to mix up general with particular categories, placing them in the series as though of the same rank with subordinate categories.

Taking them from his later edition of "The Pantheon of the Mind," is it to be understood as the outline of a complete psychology? I think that it is, inasmuch as I once saw Mr. Alcott place it on the blackboard at a Teachers' Institute in the West, where psychology was under discussion, and offer it as an explanation of the difficulties propounded by the students. In the early years of my acquaintance with him I often questioned him regarding the significance of this "hierarchy of gifts," or "Pantheon of the Mind," as he called it at first; but I was not helped then by his explanations. I remember that he surprised me by making so much of instinct as he did in his oral commentary. Later I began to see what ought to have been clear from the first, that the series is one of descent, and that instinct is the last vestige of mind in its descent into nature or its first appearance on the ascent. Body as constituted of dead atoms is conceived as entirely passive, and hence as the farthest remove from mind.

Beginning our psychology then with instinct, we have self-determination in a blind form as the concomitant of embryonic life, — life in plants and in animal cells, — life before it has made for itself special organs of sense, such as hearing, tasting, etc.

When life has fashioned for itself these sense-

organs, it can apprehend or perceive things; and this is our second step from below. By *sense* must not be understood a perception of general classes, but only of particular things present to it. But instinct, though exercised only in plant life, is a form of self-activity; in sense it forms for itself its feelings by repeating them in the presence of objects. Let this power be strengthened a little, and we have the ability to repeat these self-determinations in the absence of the objects; and this is memory, or the third potency in the birth of personal man.

But with memory we have the alembic which can change the particular into the general. For when it recollects or repeats to itself its former determinations, it acquires the power of reflection; it sees and knows the difference between recollections and immediate perceptions; the latter seem objective, and the former subjective. But now it sees that the self possesses a creative power that can reproduce for itself at pleasure the remembered object. Any given instance of recall is only one special act of the self-determining energy of the subject, or ego. Hence there arises consciousness of self-identity or selfhood through reflection, or the activity of recollection; that is to say, the idea of a pure universal, which is the permanent identity under the variable states of mind. Con-

temporaneous with the consciousness of self as ego, arises the idea of a universal as the essence of each and every particular thing. Just as my determination of faculty reproduces the picture of the object before seen, so the force underlying the particular object as its essence determines itself in the production of said particular object. Each particular object, then, is only an effect, a result of the action of the energy that produces it; and the mind flies from the result to its cause, and fixes on it as the reality. The particular thing is only secondary and derivative; it is not an ultimate reality, but only what has become and is becoming through the action of its essence or producing synthesis of forces. Here we are arrived at the first power of generalization, which, however, is blind or unconscious. For we think that we name the particular object before us when we say, "Here is a tree," and do not perceive that we name only its class of objects until we arrive at a philosophical faculty long afterwards. We say "a tree," — that is, one of the class *tree*. We mean the tree-producing synthesis of forces that has produced and still sustains this individual tree. With this we have arrived at the fourth gift in our ascent, — the understanding perceives facts, or the doing or making of things. Its object is a process and not a single result; it is a general or universal. We

have arrived at name-giving or language-using beings, such as men are in their lowest stage of civilization.

Now, if we reproduce not merely the thing or object perceived, but recall for ourselves the process which originates the thing, we use fancy, which is a freer form of memory (if we take the word as Mr. Alcott seems to in this scale). Fancy makes images, and it can do this only by recalling universal processes. When I think a process, I think it as a cause of an effect, and I follow it in its production to the dead result or image. Fancy, or the free use of the process of understanding which goes behind things to their producing processes, is therefore the fifth step. The sixth is given as reason, whose object is truth. The truth of things is their genesis, and includes them as immediate dead results together with their producing causes or universals. But their producing causes are not exhausted in the single particulars before the senses; it requires fancy to complete our knowledge of such universals. We fancy this and that other particular result as proceeding from the cause, and by this mental process of experiment we come to see the general cause in its true efficacy; we come to understand it as an energy. We thus come to know truth; and this mental action is reason, which is not limited to

particular objects like sense and memory, nor to their special productions, as are understanding and fancy; but it has the sustained power of seeing a process by itself without the aid of an image.

Mind has now arrived at the stage of idealism, were it only conscious of what it has reached. But it is not thus conscious, at least reflectively. On this stage, however, it can make for itself a mythology, the first beginnings of religion. Moreover, it sees as the truth everywhere transcendent beings, — self-determined beings that are self-existent though invisible. It has arrived at animism, and explains all movements in nature by the hypothesis of invisible spirits.

It now enters on its seventh step of ascent from the abyss. It begins to explore the realm of motives, and to construct for itself a theory of the action of these invisible spirits; they have some system on which they act just as we men do. This realm of relations between spiritual beings is the realm in which the imagination dwells. It constructs for itself always a world of inward motives that account for movements in the universe. Sun-myths arise as this projection of man's inward world upon nature, whose (that is, nature's) essence is only a congeries of personal self-hoods or spirits.

In considering these motives of the self, there

gradually emerges the ethical idea, and we have gained an eighth step, the conscience. For the elaboration of the motives of action on the part of a self-determined being or ego in his interrelation with others develops the idea of a universal form for such self-activity, necessary to be followed if the train of actions shall not reduce itself to zero. Respect for the self-activity of others is necessary, or else the individual ego will collide with all other egos, and they will make common cause against him, and thus return on him his own negative deeds, and thereby annul him.

Positive, self-reinforcing action is therefore ethical, that which combines with others and helps them. A social whole is conceived in which each helps all and all help each. This universal form of the activity of a self-determining being is the ideal of right or righteousness; and the psychologic form which perceives such a total of self-activity is called *conscience*. The imagination in its process of generating the conscience produces folk-lore, fairy stories, proverbs, Æsopian fables, and finally in its highest potency Homeric epics and Sophoclean dramas.

The ninth step is Person; and its definition is found in the *will*. For freedom is the result of conscience, and insight is completed when it sees self-activity not merely as the producer of things

and images, nor yet as isolated, independent spirits, or genii, but as socially related spirits who act ethically, realizing in each individual will the will of the whole, or the absolute Divine Spirit.

Reversing our progress, in which each upward step has been converted into the next one above it by the act of the ego reflecting upon it and perceiving its form (turning the gaze of consciousness from the particulars to the general form or mode in which said particulars arise), we may formulate our descent as follows: —

Beginning with Person, whose will is formed by conscience, we let it become lawless and disobey conscience; then it loses, by its disuse of conscience as guiding principle, even the perception of duty, and falls back to unbridled spiritual action, into that world of epic struggle and Titanism which the imagination reveals in national epics and mythologies. Falling still, it contracts its view to that of unrelated, independent powers, — for its problem of the struggle of spiritual beings to secure their selfish purposes is not solved positively in obedience to ethical law, but negatively in the destruction of all social relation whatever, just as Dante has pictured this in the city of Dis in his “Inferno.” Universal and absolute pride destroys all social existence, and we have left nothing but isolated individuals. Reason dis-

covered these individuals as the truth which is the presupposition of fancy and understanding. But for sheer lack of social activity, which has been annulled through loss of conscience, the reason dwindles and loses its self-activity, which is self-contradiction unless ethical. Hence we lose also fancy, which is the first blind activity of Reason. Then we have left only the understanding, which recognizes its object not as a spiritual might, but sees it only as a particular causal ground of this particular thing or object of the senses.

Further descent makes dim this percept of the cause behind the individual object, and we have left only the power of recalling the objects once experienced, and we are imprisoned like certain animals in the memory.

Further lapse of power through disuse of self-activity shuts up the perspective of memory and recollection, and we are limited to immediate sense-perception. Even this fails, too, because the memory furnishes what is called the power of apperception, or the power of recognition. Without apperception we cannot identify this object with our previous experience. Without memory, therefore, the senses dwindle from five to one by shutting up seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting, and touch only is left. For recognition and identification are the product of comparing two terms,

one of which is immediately perceived, and the other remembered.

One step more remains, and the senses are all gone, and only vegetative functions of life remain. Their soul is instinct. Take away instinct and we have left only body composed of dead atoms, and we can go no further.

If this interpretation of Mr. Alcott's psychologic theory is true, it may be found to throw some light on the words with which he introduces this section:—

“Instinct is the fountain of Personal power and mother of the Gifts. [“Striving to be man, the worm mounts through all the spires of form,” says Emerson; that which strives to be man is the power of instinct, says Alcott.] With instinct there may be an embryo, but sense must be superinduced to constitute an animal; memory, moral sentiment, reason, imagination, personality to constitute man. The mind is the man, not the outward shape; all is in the Will. The animal may mount to fancy in the grade of gifts; but reason, imagination, conscience, choice—the mediating, creative, ruling powers—belong to man alone.”

The form of will action is choice, the characteristic feature of personality. In treating of the Person and Choice, Mr. Alcott displays the serenest height of his speculation. It is here that he equals Kapila in the demand for freedom from the

root of egotism, — the categories of the understanding; but he surpasses Kapila in that his fine discrimination saves the ego as person, while it sacrifices it only as brittle individualism, — Kapila (*Sankhya Karika*) being obliged to destroy both.

“By choice man leaps upwards, or by choice he lapses downwards. Yet while free to choose, he sinks himself never beneath himself absolutely [he only goes so far as he chooses, and the power of choice always remains]. His choices free or fetter, elevate or debase, deify or demoralize humanity.” Choice, the attribute of personality, is the key alike to the pit and to the abode of the blest; and hence the high place Mr. Alcott assigns to it.

In the chapter headed “Genesis,” we have the subtle doctrine of correspondence unfolded in the sections entitled *Vestiges*, *Serpent Symbol*, *Embryons*, and *Temperament*. Thus we have the origin discussed under *Vestiges*. Man is prior to nature, which is taken literally in the doctrine of *Lapse*, but is always true as a mystic statement for the doctrine that mind or thought is the prior condition, the creator of matter or nature. The final cause to which all aspire is the free intelligence, and hence we find all lower creatures exhibiting traces of man, and hence, too, we have

the doctrine of correspondences. But we have another doctrine that gives us the same result; namely, the psychological one, that all imperfect beings are through the consciousness of man. This is the "knowledge of good and evil" that comes from eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. For as man perceives partially and analytically, he takes objects out of their true relations, and hence creates evil by imperfect knowing; for to the one who sees all things in their true relations there can be no such thing as evil.

The serpent symbol treated in section second — pointing to the mysteries of sex, the symbol of the generic entity, hence denoting divine wisdom and eternity — is a natural correspondence found everywhere among primitive peoples.

The generic becomes real in the embryo (treated in section third), and mounts thence "through all the spires of form." "Every creature," says Mr. Alcott, "assists at its own formation."

But temperament is a fate which opposes the course of development with more or less effect; and this is next considered (section four). It is the mortgage of nature upon spirit, and no one wholly escapes it. There is, however, comfort for all: —

"Yet, biassed by temperament as we may be, whether for good or for evil, such measure of freedom is ours,

nevertheless, as enables us to free ourselves from its tendencies and temptations. In the breast of each is a liberating angel, at whose touch, when we will it persistently, the doors of our dungeon fly open and loose their prisoner."

As we enter the final compartment of the book, we see the strange-sounding inscription from Hermes Trismegistus over the portal: "Generation is not a creation of life, but a production of things to sense, and making them manifest. Neither is change death, but a hiding of that which was."

The general subject is *Metamorphoses*, under which he treats sleep, reminiscence, and immortality. Two of these phases of our life — sleep and reminiscence — furnish for us the clew to the doctrine of immortality.

Sleep is the recurrence of embryonic life, — a sort of return to pre-existence. Reminiscence is the thread by which we hold to our former selves; that is, preserve the continuity which makes us personal beings. It is memory, as we have seen in commenting above on *The Gifts*, that gives us the perception of our self-activity in perceiving, and it is this again which gives us the possibility of language by taking all objects as members of classes. Hence reminiscence was perceived by Plato to have great significance. Mr. Alcott very

aptly quotes here from Wordsworth's ode, "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting," and adds:—

"None of us remember when we did not remember, when memory was naught and ourselves were unborn. Memory is the premise of our sensations, it dates our immortality. Nestling ever in the twilight of our earliest recollections, it cradles our nativity, canopies our hopes, and bears us babes out of our bodies as into them; opening vistas alike into our past and coming existence. The thread of our experiences, it cannot be severed by any accidents of our mortality; time and space, earliest found and last to leave us, fading and falling away as we pass into recollections which these can neither date nor confine,—the smiles that welcomed, the tears that dismiss us, being of no age nor place nor time."

"Memory is the premise of our sensations; it dates our immortality,"—that is, we cannot perceive sensations except actively. We presuppose the original intelligibles of the mind in every sensation, and these are said to be reminiscences of our pre-existence in the Platonic form of expression. Immortality is our true life: "'T is not our bodies that contain us, but our souls. None beholds with bodily eyes the apparition of his person, sees and survives the ghost that he provokes."

Desire is the feeling of unity with that which lies outside of and beyond one's immediate being; it is the evidence of our potential unity with all being.

“Moreover, the insatiableness of our desires asserts our personal imperishableness. Yearning for full satisfactions while balked of these perpetually, we still prosecute our search for them, our faith in their attainment remaining unshaken under every disappointment. Our hope is eternal as ourselves,—a never-ending, still-beginning quest of our divinity. Infinite in essence, we crave it in potency. Our delights suckle us life-long, our desires being memories of past satisfactions, and we here but sip pleasures once tasted to satiety.”

“Our desires being memories of past satisfactions,” —that is, a feeling of unity with our totality, which is the macrocosm itself,—what can be more natural than that the part must be posterior to the whole, that the separation must be preceded by the union? Therefore that desire must be preceded by a union with that which is desired, for how can one desire what he does not in any wise know?

Whatever may be our verdict regarding the logical possibility of uniting a theory of ascent and evolution to a theory of lapse, we are certain that Mr. Alcott believed in their reconciliation,

and taught it in his "Tablets;" and even if we adopt the evolution theory entire, and repudiate the theory of genesis by means of fallen angels or men, yet we must admit that there are certain tonic effects still to be obtained from its contemplation, and that its poetic uses are perennial.

From a sociological point of view, as well as from that of the history of philosophy, we are forced to its study in order to comprehend the highest thinking of the Asiatic peoples, and the intellectual presuppositions of our own civilization.

I think, therefore, that Mr. Alcott's books wherein he has recorded his deepest and sincerest convictions are to be resorted to and studied along with the works of Plotinus and Proclus, inasmuch as they present this world-historic theory as a "survival" in a person born in our own age.

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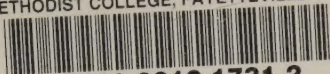
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